

**PENGUIN
BOOKS**

**ENGLAND'S
GREEN & PLEASANT
LAND**

ESSAYS

**J. W. ROBERTSON
SCOTT**

COMPLETE



UNABRIDGED

ONE SHILLING

FOUNDED

1774 BY THE

1774

ENGLAND'S GREEN & PLEASANT LAND

The Truth Attempted

BY

J. W. ROBERTSON-SCOTT

Editor of 'The Countryman'

*Country totally different from what I have been
used to—*Johnson

I would enliven the truth with the smile—
Hutton

*We are here to search the wounds of the realm,
not to skim them over—*Bacon

*Brought near to a conviction of the reality
of it—*Pepys

*It was work requiring to be done and it was
better done thus than not at all—*Introduction
to Bishop Butler



PENGUIN BOOKS

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To the Memory of
THE LABOURING MEN AND WOMEN
who died on Pisgah

These died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

—Hebrews xi. 13

We may talke what we please of Lilies and Lions Rampant, and Spread Eagles in Fields d'Or or d'Argent; but if Heraldry were guided by Reason, a Plough in a Field Arable would be the most Noble and Antient Armes.—Bacon

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*All out of print but those marked **

- The People of China (*Methuen*)
In Search of a £150 Cottage
The Small Farm (*Lane*)
Country Cottages (*Heinemann*)
Poultry Farming : Some Facts and Some Conclusions (*Murray*)
The Townsman's Farm (*Cassell*)
The Strange Story of the Dunmow Flitch
Sugar-Beet : Some Facts and Some Illusions ; a Study in Rural
Therapeutics (*Field*) *
A Free Farmer in a Free State : Holland (*Heinemann*)
The Land Problem (*Collins*)
Hints from the Notebook of an Old Farmer
A Plea for an Open Air Museum
War and Peace in Holland : Despatches on the War in a Dutch
Translation
Japan, Great Britain and the World (in English and Japanese)
The Ignoble Warrior (in English and Japanese)
A Little Lesson in English and the English Character (in English
and Japanese)
The Foundations of Japan : 6000 miles in its Rural Districts
(*Murray*) *
The Story of the Women's Institutes (*Countryman*) *
The Dying Peasant and the Future of his Sons (*Williams and
Norgate*) *
The Country Citizen (*Countryman*) *

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A Note
WHICH SHOULD BE READ
to the present Edition

ACCORDING to the Press Opinions on an earlier page, this book, in its first two editions, did its bit. The suggestion is now made that it may do a bit more.

For two reasons.

First, as we shall see, it says a great deal that still needs to be said, bluntly and readably enough, and in a book low-priced enough, as these Penguin books are, to be widely read.

In the second place, the gladdening advance recorded in *a new section* of three Chapters, AFTER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY (to be precise, twenty-three years) will (as I trust) encourage the further efforts of well-wishers of the countryside.

In these three Chapters some notion is given of the remarkable changes which it has been possible to bring about within a generation, and of the marked development of public feeling in that time. As I went through the original book to make a sentence clearer, more forcible or less sweeping—never to alter anything in the light of present conditions—I was *amazed* by the gap between Then and Now.

We may deplore—or smile at—the state of things in the Nineteen-twenties. But we must be very grateful for the distance we have been able to travel since then. We have also to consider the prospects of further progress, and the means by which this progress may be brought about.

My first thought was to add footnotes throughout. In some places particularly I had difficulty in keeping myself from doing so. But footnotes are troublesome to the reader, and it seemed to be more profitable for him to read on uninterrupted, and to have the advantage of being first in Nineteen-twenty-four and then in Nineteen-forty-seven. So there are few footnotes in the body of the book.

Will the buyer of this book kindly bear in mind, therefore, that what he reads from pages xiii to 167 is an account of conditions in England's green and pleasant land *a quarter of a century ago*. The relevance of the account lies in the fact that it is impossible to judge justly the villagers of *today* without knowledge of the experience of an earlier generation.

From pages 168 to 178 something is shown of *the technical and social advance that has been made up to 1947*.

There follows an examination of the grounds on which our hopes for the future may be based.

Consideration is given particularly to the adequacy of the means of social regeneration which we possess in organised religion. At a time when the development of morality is so generally stressed as the foundation of progress, and great demands are being made on national strength, it would be idle, in a sociological study, to shirk looking closely into the efficiency of the oldest and most widely established institutions we possess for the promotion of the good life.

In writing of parsons, farmers and farm-workers I have not been mealy-mouthed.

While it has been my sincere desire to refrain as far as possible from hurting the feelings of readers of a different experience, of a different pace and environment, of different convictions from my own, the author of a book with a serious aim may as well spare himself the toil of writing if he does not say what he has to say plainly.

*

But a reminder (which is repeated on page 164) may be given. As G. K. Chesterton explained, 'the notion that a character must be "meant" for somebody is founded on a misunderstanding of the nature of narrative fancy'.

This book is assuredly 'founded on fact'. But no village is depicted. And, though many persons have supplied touches of character, there is no portrait of anybody. What is in these pages is written on the basis of knowledge assimilated in various ways and in many places. The book is a mass of transpositions

and adaptations. And, when I write in the first person, it may be, as often as not, as every author will understand, for literary convenience, not to make out that I saw this or the other thing at a particular place or heard it at a particular time and from a particular person.

It should be unnecessary to say all this. But—though efforts to worm out ‘the originals’ in many books and fit on caps have been frequently reprobated and have been constantly marked by failure—stupidity and contrariness continue to exist, with results which every author who feels it to be his duty to deal with real life is sorry for, but cannot do much about. Trollope spoke the truth on the subject in what he wrote about the characters in his fictitious county of Barsetshire:

‘Sir Raffle Buffle was intended to represent a type, not a man; but the man for the picture was soon chosen, and I was often assured that the portrait was very like. I have never seen the gentleman with whom I am supposed to have taken the liberty. . . . The descriptions and opinions came hot on the paper from their causes. . . . There are two kinds of confidence which a reader may have in his author. There is a confidence in facts and a confidence in vision. . . . I have been asked in what period of my early life I had lived so long in a cathedral city as to have become intimate with the ways of a Close. I have never lived in any cathedral city so as to have become intimate with the ways of the Close. I have never lived in any cathedral city, never knew anything of any Close, and at that time had enjoyed no peculiar intimacy with any clergyman. My archdeacon, who was said to be life-like, was the simple result of an effort of my moral consciousness.’

On a bibliographical point, it may be stated that the original articles of 1924 were modestly anonymous, and so was the book of 1925 and 1931. But the authorship of the articles and book has been freely acknowledged in works of reference and elsewhere.

*

*Idbury Manor, Kingham, Oxford,
February 1947.*

INTRODUCTION

TO ORIGINAL EDITION

I AM not responsible for this volume. Within a period of eighteen months, in which the articles on which it is based were being printed in the *Nation*,¹ seven letters were received from publishers proposing that a book should be made of them. There were also the editors and sub-editors who reproduced the articles in their papers.

Is it for me to say that all these skilled gentlemen do not know what ought to be published? When a rustic writer blushfully reads, as a Poor Law Guardian,² in the *Poor Law Officers' Journal*, that the article which is now Chapter 17, is 'one of the most sympathetic and charming descriptions of the activities of a rural Board of Guardians ever written,' is it for him ungraciously to underline the 'one of'?

Further, men and women of repute said or wrote unlooked-for things to the pseudonymous author. Did not the ex-Premier³ more than once commit himself to the view that the articles were 'the best thing since Cobbett'? And there was a woman of a different way of political thinking, whose husband has written many books; she had to write, she said, 'because it is so seldom that I can read anything about village life that is *accurate*.'

Beyond such trials to modesty, a dozen or more wrathful letters were received from country clergymen. There seemed to be additional inducement to seek a wider public for writing of which, whatever its shortcomings, one class of the rural community felt the point.

The recollection that the editor of the *Nation*⁴ who had at first

¹ Now the *New Statesman and Nation*.

² The Guardians have been superseded by the public assistance committees of the county councils.

³ Lloyd George.

⁴ Now Sir Hubert Henderson, Professor of Political Economy at Oxford.

agreed to accept four articles, had printed twenty-four, decided the matter.

*

My thanks are due, not only to him and to the *Nation* for the customary permission to republish, but to many friends and correspondents, whom I may not name, and to my wife, who wrote 'The Beech Leaf' (page 56) and has enriched every Chapter by her insight.

For some of the other things that people usually say, or would like to say, in Introductions, kindly see the Postscript when you have finished the book.

I

A Quarter of a Century Ago

*

CHAPTER I

‘HOME’

Of all situations for a constant residence, that which appears to me most delightful is a little village, a small neighbourhood with inhabitants whose faces are familiar, a little world of our own, close-packed, insulated like sheep in a fold, where we know every one, are known to every one, interested in every one.—*Mitford*

What has really been going forward is very different from what has always been pretended. We have very seraphical notions.—*Cromwell*

IN the hamlet in which I came to live every cottage, including two of my own, had been ‘reported against’.

My two are at the bottom of my garden. They went with my house at the sale.

The occupants seemed to think that I should ‘do something’ to their dwellings. One tenant (I write as the situation confronted me at the time) pays 6*d.*, and the other 4½*d.* a week. The 6*d.* and the 4½*d.* each buy three rooms of sorts, an outhouse, and a good garden. The rates, land tax and income tax for the cottages come to more than the rents.

I took the sanitary inspector to the cottages. Plainly, it was no use ‘doing something’ to them if they ought to be pulled down. Pulling them down would suit me very well. I should save money. The ground could be added to my garden. I should have more quiet.

In the stone walls there were holes into which I could thrust a hand. The foundation stones were slipping in places. The

thatch let in the wet at more than one spot. The 'rafters' supporting the roof were most of them rough stuff with the bark on, such as is cut with a billhook from the undergrowth of Tackley wood or from the high hedges. There were many worm-holes. String was tied to some of the 'rafters' to hold on the thatch. The ground floor, being below garden level, was damp near the walls.

As the sanitary inspector ran his foot-rule round the cottages, downstairs and upstairs, official formulae of cubic-foot allowances for living-rooms and bedrooms, of square feet necessary for windows, were successively outraged.

When the inspector came out he said, 'I'm ready to advise a closing order for these cottages'.

'But where are the people to go?' I asked.

One of the cottagers is an old man, a naval pensioner. The other is a one-legged widower, a pensioned railway porter. He has two widowed daughters—their husbands were killed at Mons and Passchendaele. Betsy has a small girl. The widower was born in the cottage he occupies. So was his father.

The people in these cottages do not want to move. They have never known anything better.

Yes, the two women, when they were in service, or went charring, have known something better. But they recognized that conditions of magnificence, such as they saw the quality lived in, were not for the likes of them. They have no complaint against the cottages but for the damp, which makes them dread rheumatics.

And they suggest that I might 'do something' to the cottages. Am I not a rich gentleman? See what I have spent on my own house. They do not say this. But they think it. And it is no use telling them that I write for a living.

The cottages, with all their defects, have inside a look and a feeling of comfort. They are damp in places only. They are not cold. There are no draughts. The firesides are snug, the small low-ceilinged living-rooms cosy.

And everything is clean and trim. All the structural weaknesses and shortcomings, except where the wet is coming in, are hidden.

by the well-kept odds and ends of furniture, by whitewash, by scraps of wallpaper, by grocers' almanacs and church mottoes. A verse of a popular recitation would seem to show that it has often been very much like this:

The cottage was a thatched one,
The outside old and mean,
But everything within that cot
Was wondrous neat and clean.

'Patch it up a little if you can, is my advice,' said the sanitary inspector; 'keep it going until the old folk die or feel they want to go to stay with their people.'

But it is no easy task patching an old roof. In cutting into old thatch, a thatcher will tell you, you may let in as much water as you are keeping out, and some of the sorry roof-wood may crack and the thatcher may break through. Layers of thatch are heavy stuff. To cover the roofs afresh would mean three or four tons of straw, and there has to be something to take the weight.

A Radical farmer friend had no doubt about what I should do: 'Have the cottages closed, and make one decent cottage out of them.'

Neither was a labourers' union secretary at a loss with a remedy: 'Put them in complete order and charge an economic rent.'

But there is no material in the buildings worth much for reconstruction. Proper rebuilding and fitting up would cost every penny of £500. At 5 per cent. that is 9s. 6d. a week, which no labourer, even of cowman and horseman rank, let alone the present tenants, could possibly pay. So that plan would not do, even if I had the £500 to spare.

In worse plight than my thatched cottages are the stone-roofed or slate-roofed cottages of the hamlet—slate-roofed because the impoverished estate found it cheaper to re-cover the roofs with the horrid blue slates than with the old stone stuff of the district.

These cottages are really cold. The roof stones or slates are not torched (have no mortar below them), and a blast of cold air comes into the unceiled bedrooms. When there is a wind on a

frosty night the cold is 'perishing'. 'A man doesn't want to go to bed,' Silas Attridge told me; 'your teeth fairly chatter.' Old people take a hot brick to bed but 'simply can't keep warm'.

In the spirit of making a public subscription, or by way of doing something for Servicemen's widows, or of improving my view, or of easing my conscience, I have spent, in nicely thatching my cottages, tinkering up their walls, and putting a decent roof and a new door on the garden privies, more than I shall get for this book.¹ But the modest comforts of my own house, the simple delights of my garden, and the serenity for which I live in the country are broken in upon and spoilt by thoughts of how the rest of the village endures the winter.

That is right, of course.

Meanwhile, let those who have the talent go on doing nice water-colours of

The cottage homes of England!
By thousands on her plains,
They are smiling o'er the silvery brooks,²
And round the hamlet fanes!

*

I hope you do not mind my mentioning the stinking privies. This book must be out-spoken and comprehensive. If not, for anything it can add to other books, it might as well end with this first Chapter.

Possibly some country doctor has estimated how much of the ill-health of our patent medicine-buying hamlets is due to the bad habits which poor people form because the privies are at the bottom of the gardens, and, to get to them in driving wet, means an act of will. It is outrageous that the girls of the pleasantest labouring family in our hamlet can only reach their cottage privy by crossing the road.

¹ When the widower died I knocked the two cottages into one.

² And are therefore damp.

THE PEOPLE OF THE HAMLET

Take any one considerable circle where you know everybody, and the condition of that circle will teach you how to judge pretty correctly.—*Cobbett*

‘HOME,’ said an old country parson friend to me once, ‘is where you know everybody.’ Most of my rural life has been spent in hamlets where I have known everybody.

Among my fellow-cottagers there have been a few old men and women of some physical, mental or moral distinction, often unable to read. The others have been such folk as their hamlet’s way of life had produced. Conduct poultry-rearing on a system of selling all the best cockerels and pullets, and breeding from what is left, and the result is sure. For years and years most of the men and women of grit had gone away or been driven away. Those who remained had mated with the second, third or fourth-rate of their own or some neighbouring hamlet.

Yet, generation after generation, Nature, in her optimistic way, had done her best to give many babies a better start than their parentage promised them. The children might sometimes be undersized or weak. In intelligence they might lack the full endowment of the better born. But the young human material had potentialities. Something might have been done with it. Only a little timely care and trouble was needed. But it was not given. And Nature, having made her effort, seemed to sink back, well-nigh defeated.

But an injured tree puts forth, under the shadow of death, every flower it can. So there are denizens of these physically and mentally impoverished hamlets who, with apparently no chances, have made their spurt and their small mark.

A few labourers a little above the average have always been forthcoming. There have invariably been a few young women

with sufficient ability, natural and cultivated, to secure 'good places'. Two cottages, the life of which seems miserable enough, have sent out a succession of cooks who earn good money. Things are continually happening in these hamlets which force the remark that in no country is there better human stuff if only it were cared for.

But almost everything is wrong.

In the last Chapter I wrote of dwellings some people live in. Since then, the wife of a young labourer, with three children, has had a baby. The family, which includes the widowed father of the young man, has a very small living-room and two imperfectly shut-off cubby-holes of bedrooms. What chance is there of order, health, decency, courage, good spirits, or ideals in such dismal overcrowding in a cottage which has been 'reported against'?

And the overcrowding is as bad in two-thirds of the cottages, all equally unsatisfactory by the sanitary inspector's standard.

You will appreciate the irony of trying deeply to engage unfortunates, corralled in such conditions, in the distinctions between Conservative, Liberal and Labour, or of endeavouring to bring them to church to hear the parson say, as he said last night, that 'the greatest gift God could bring to the world would be the union of the Church of the East with the Church of the West'!

After we had the schoolchildren to our fireside to tea, my wife and I came to the conclusion that there was hardly one of them that was even physically what it might have been and might be if child-welfare were a national care.

That carefully worded sentence means just what it says.

When we had a new garden boy, living in, I introduced him, as I had introduced his predecessor, to the bathroom. I told him that before he went to bed he ought to take a hot bath. But the sounds of bathing were inaudible. So I went into the bathroom, as I had gone into it on the occasion of the other boy's first bath. The lad, like his predecessor, was aimlessly patting at himself. Never having had a bath in his life, he did not know how to take one. I showed him how, and, as his back was grimed, I scrubbed it for him, as I had scrubbed the other boy's. The physique of the

two boys was no doubt typical of the physique of most of the people of the hamlet at their age. The boys' arms and calves, which had been exercised in the long hours of farm and farmhouse work, were pitifully developed. The legs were out of the straight, and skinny. The boys had hollow chests and their backs were bent and twisted. The feel of the protuberant bones of the spine as my soapy flannel went over it was a thing I do not forget.

In the short time these boys were with us their appearance and demeanour changed. But in training such youths you cannot begin at the stage of youth. It is necessary to go back to the things that the lads ought to have learnt as little more than toddlers. And the time lost by the denizens of the hamlet can never be made up. Even the mill of the best intentions cannot grind with the water that is past.

The saying is that we must begin with the child. We must begin before the child. We must begin before its parents. We must begin with the cottage in which they live. We must begin with the conditions which are responsible for the cottage and decide its occupants' way of living.

Much of the misery of the hamlet is hidden from the passer-by, however sympathetic.

It is hidden by the cheerfulness which daylight and sunshine bring, by the cheerfulness which comes from human companionship, from the satisfaction of work, and from the hope that wells up in every bosom and the faith that is held there, however insecurely.

What spurs us to try to change present conditions for better is the thought that they need not be.

Their only cause is ignorance, so many people's ignorance, and an indifference and unkindness which have their springs in dullness, or, one may say, lack of imagination.

As things are in the hamlets, the place for the sensitive, comfortably-off to be 'happy' in is London or some other city. In cities you do not need to know your neighbours.

In the hamlets, if you bare your heart the least bit, a dog-like look of regard and yearning comes into poor people's faces. You

have your feelings drawn out to men and women, young and middle-aged, the erring, struggling, hoping, fearful, distrustful, ignorant folk all of us are. Now and then, usually in the dark, one gets a handgrip that . . . Once an old woman, by whose bedside I was sitting, kissed me.

What *is* to be done for these people?

What *is* one's duty to one's neighbour?

It would appear from last night's hymn that what it called 'the humble poor' are in the care of God and their betters.

Let us see just what the Church, the big house, the farmhouse, and the schoolhouse have to give.

CHAPTER 3

‘SMILIN’ THROUGH’

The cherfulness of the people is so sprightly up, it betokn’s us not drooping to a fatal decay.—*Milton*

I AM trying my very best to make a faithful picture. I am succeeding passably if, so far, the reader has gained an impression of a little place that has been *hauden doon*. But ‘held down’ is hardly the English for *hauden doon*. What is? Depressed, dejected, spiritless, crestfallen, low-spirited, melancholic, sad, forlorn—as I sit at my desk this sunshiny morning none of these words seems the right one. I turn to the dictionary and find that the meanings given for ‘forlorn’ are forsaken, solitary, helpless, friendless, hopeless, wretched, miserable, pitiable. ‘Forlorn’ is too strong. No community can be wholly forlorn.

But it is no overstatement to say that the hamlet has a forlorn look and that its life seems drab.

It is a speaking fact that as small a hamlet as ours should have contained last year no fewer than four separate cottages in roofless ruin.

I say contained, because, within a few months, the stone of two of the cottages has been used to build a new cottage, and the tottering walls on the other two sites have been carted away to make field dykes and to repair farm buildings. So there is life somewhere.

One night, when I was sitting with old William Hampson, he said: ‘What’s wrong is that the owner of the land’s always been poor, and living away. As cottages got anyhow, and a many has fallen down in my time, nobody did nothing to ’em. There’s never been none here to take an interest in the place—never none here but the labouring people and the farmers, none to lead, nothing to raise the people and liven them.’

‘And,’ his wife added, ‘not even a parson’—the church is

served from a neighbouring village. 'Seemed like, sometimes, as if 'twere a heathen place.'

Something happened last night which is not easy to bring into the picture—a 'fancy-dress ball' in the schoolroom!

I was asked to be present for an hour to distribute the prizes, and I looked out and donned an old, outlandish oversea robe, and took my way along the dark road with curiosity and an electric torch.

The gathering was the culmination of a series of dancing lessons, given by the assistant schoolmistress (the wheelwright's daughter), and attended by the young people of the hamlet and some neighbouring hamlets. The ball had been arranged by the dancers, and none but cottagers took part in it. There may have been sixty young men and women 'dressed up' and another twenty or thirty onlookers. It cost a shilling to go in. Refreshments were included in the shilling.

Lighting is the usual shortcoming of a rural entertainment. But as the lamp lighting is as good as the lighting of the cottages no one complains.

It was not to be expected that much of the dancing would be better than the lighting. But there was plenty of mirth, and, along with, occasionally, a little open and above-board cuddling, a marked discretion and politeness.

In order that the winning costumes might be fairly chosen, it was prudently decided to appoint a committee on which each hamlet that had sent dancers should be equally represented.

The first prize-winner was the assistant schoolmistress. She had made herself a paper dress and covered it with colour drawings of the school and hamlet; also of the sea and its ships, and of the bus that, out of the profits of the ball, is to take the children to the seaside, to behold them.

The next award went to a girl who had sewn on her costume representations in cloth of every vegetable mentioned in 'Yes, we have no bananas'.

From the male masqueraders, who included two Charlie Chaplins, the adjudicators gave honours to a lad who was inside an

imitation grandfather's clock, and to my garden boy, who sported a suit of my pyjamas and carried in his arms a make-believe baby.

The happiness and civility of this gathering, and the mental and financial resources of which the costumes were the product, incline me to think that, like many other gatherings which are now arranged in villages and hamlets without assistance from gentry, parsons or farmers, the ball marks a new stage in rural civilization in southern England.

Strangers to our country life will wonder, no doubt, how the standard attained at this gathering is to be reconciled with the limitations of the home life of the hamlet as I have described them. That it is not easy to reconcile the two things is only one more illustration of the difficulty of understanding what cottage life is really like.

How many rooms are there in your house or in my house? On the instant you cannot say, I cannot say. If now and then you go from such a house as you and I live in—centrally heated and electrically lighted—to a three- or a four-roomed cottage, in poor repair, in which a large family of all ages is living much of its life in one room, with some of the washing or ironing overhead, does it seem likely that you will easily understand that family's ways of life and points of view?

Nothing is easier than for men and women of one experience of life to theorize confidently about the feelings, wishes and powers of men and women of quite another experience. Those who, with one experience of life, try most painstakingly to enter into the existence of people of another way of life meet with surprises to the end of their days.

One thing is certain about last night's merry-makers. Half of them went home to sleep in unceiled rooms.

There are other things in the cottage way of life, besides the sleeping arrangements, which you and I might not find easy—for example, one privy for two cottages, and water only to be had across the way. What seems true about the people in these cottages is that they put enjoyment of life, as they understand it, before some kinds of comfort.

If that is not a mark of advancing civilization, what is?

A single man who has been working for me lives in a decrepit and overcrowded cottage where, to our notions, there is no comfort. But he does not say so. The most he says is that 'it's a poor place'. And I heard that, a few miles away the other night, he won the first prize at a whist drive, where there were fifty tables and the entrance fee was 1s. 3d.

A hard life is not unhappy because it is hard. Are there cheerier folk in the world than the Eskimo? The people of narrow means in the unceiled cottages draw my sympathy. But it is not so much because their life is laborious as because it lacks opportunity and inspiration.

Poverty is poverty, but life on financial resources which are renewed more or less adequately every Saturday is not poverty. The limited funds of the labourer's family do not make its way of life mean.

The liberality of weekly wage-earners to the unfortunate, and the help they give to them, and to religious, political or social causes in which they become interested, are often, in proportion to the subscriptions and donations of rich people, remarkable.

If the wives were not so overworked, if their dwellings were not below a reasonable hygienic standard, if cottagers did not miss so much that makes life fuller and freer, the cottage life would have much to recommend it.

The ball-givers, in seeking to have something in their days beyond hard work, were right.

The labouring class often seems to be, and often is, extravagant and improvident. But which of us, if we tell ourselves the truth, is not extravagant and improvident in one way or other, and which of us does not sometimes feel better for it? Which of us, without the opportunities of reading, counsel and reflection which have come our way, would not be more imprudent still?

From the refuse dump of the hamlet—that is one of the things that badly needs reforming—I have just retrieved half a dozen old pails and bath tins with holes in their bottoms. I wanted to

use them in forcing rhubarb. They ought not to have been improvidently thrown away.

Old chairs, particularly old arm-chairs, are often broken up.

Nobody in the cottages seems able to make soup or wants porridge.

The petty wastefulness of cottage girls in service is persistent.

But it is also true that wherever, up and down England, women’s institutes have provided instruction in soldering, chair-mending and kitchen economics it has been eagerly accepted.

If, in the supposed interests of national economy, we choose to narrow, instead of to widen, the household-economy curriculum of the rural schools, we are bound to have cottage waste.

Sorely-tired employers who are economists, and are mindful of the good of those who work for them, may sometimes say in their wrath that only the fear of hunger will discipline a certain type of worker. But we know very well that poverty, with all the ills it brings to those who suffer it, and to the community to which they belong, is not the surest means of teaching a reasonable way of life.

The instinct which moved last night’s dancers to set above saving a shilling or two the advantages of cheery, stimulating social life, and an agreeable relationship of the sexes, was sound. The gaiety of spirit which unequal fortune had not quenched was gladdening. The worst that is to be feared in the neglected countryside is lethargy, a hopeless acquiescence. There was no sign of that in last night’s open, buoyant, friendly countenances.

Several of these young neighbours ought to have been taller, or had straighter backs, or better legs. But there was something in these youths and maidens which, with patience and studious effort, might be moulded, something by the aid of which foundations might be laid for a better order of things in the hamlet and out of it.

The dancers enjoyed each other’s company so much that they did not, it seems, go home until one in the morning. But that is earlier, they know, than some of their betters go home from the Hunt ball.

CHAPTER 4

THEIR BETTERS

Their inward thought is, that their houses shall be continued for ever and their dwelling places to all generations. They call their lands after their own names.—*Psalms* xlix. 11

AT the barber's, or in some room at a club, one may turn over illustrated weeklies which specialize in pages of snapshots of people of prominence in a society of hunts, local point-to-point and coursing meetings, and national sporting fixtures.

In scanning the empty and ungoverned, or, often, arrogant and selfish-looking faces of so many of these in some degree conspicuous persons, one wonders how many of them are merely barbarians and vulgarians, and how many of them, though idlers, have the merit of physical courage (as was proved in the War), of a code of manners and form, which, as far as it goes, is excellent, and of a resolve to keep themselves bodily fit in their world of fine meats and pampered women.

These people, as a class, are, in the main, rather undeveloped in intelligence and ill-acquainted with the place they actually occupy in the scheme of things.

As a class, they are mostly of 'the rich'—either the hard-up rich, or peace or War profiteers and their wives, or their progeny—or they are among the sons or daughters, the nephews or nieces, the grandsons or granddaughters of men who gained titles or places in the country by their money-making or party complacency (combined, it is sometimes forgotten, with a force of character which is so often lacking in their descendants).

These people represent, of course, only a section of the reasonably well-off countryside.

Folk who come to an elevation in the rural social system do not all centre their lives on horses and killing birds and beasts, good living, and sexual relations.

It is common knowledge that the offspring of brewers, whose 'enduring token' is strings of public-houses in the meanest city streets, frequently gravitate to rectories.

There are almost always, in a rural district, greater or lesser country houses in which men and women, of more than one generation, have tried, without self-seeking, to do their share in the service of mankind.

But neither in the hamlet I have in mind, nor within easy walking distance of it, is there even the strenuous parsonage to the private income of which a just perceptible odour of 'arf-pints still clings.

Our little community knows no kindly peeress, born with a bountiful heart, and concerned to know something of the needs of the times in which she marvels to find herself; no Lady Mary This or Honourable or even plain Miss or Mr. That, whose life as such has always been, like W. S. Gilbert's Mrs. Blake, particularly blameless, whose career has been a disinterested M.P.ing or a round of county council committees, or of days spent in helping village clubs, women's institutes, rural drama, county library schemes, or a co-operative bacon factory, and of getting into the district the pick of such parsons as are to be had.

Our hamlet—in a hunting country—recognizes as the chief among its betters three families of hunting gentry, established on the borders of the parish boundary at The Towers, The Bury and a Tudor manor. A distinction between them and large-landowning farmers of the neighbourhood is that they have grooms.

As I do not know whether any of our gentry have been in the *Tatler*, I may describe them.

If you have ever noticed the number of shops which sell 'Down-pour' boots you have come on the paternal source of Squire Horwin's ease of mind and body. The horses and horsemanship of Mr. and Mrs. Horwin are first-rate. Tough old Father Horwin, now with God, via Nottingham, bragged that he rode on a tram till he was seventy-eight.

The Casson-Parkers, who, a reporter of the local paper asserted last week, 'sit their horses like centaurs', possessed a mother as

well as a father. The late Casson-Parker, senior, who had what was once described as a long and secure enjoyment of public office, married most of the accumulated profits of a firm in Bombay, which is well known in the East, but not for being squeamish.

With the Swinleys we come to blue blood. Swinley's people made beer in the West of England energetically when George IV was Defending the Faith. There was also a lawyer among them. They acquired so much land that their descendant was found worthy to espouse the fifth daughter of a peer whose family name you will find at the top of one of the House of Lords pages in *Whitaker*. You will also discover the family name, I am sorry to say, on the boards of two companies which are no better than they should be. The Swinley family is a large one. It is a non-resident Swinley who owns as much of our hamlet as he has not sold to two farmers and to two back-to-the-land-ers. Because of a gratified ambition to have a cricket eleven of sons, he is impecunious.

Our gentry might be worse, perhaps. There are members of every one of the three families who are kindly and well-intentioned.

But what precisely does this amount to if the kindly and well-intentioned have, among them, few ideas, or books, or even a periodical of importance, if the interiors of their houses are hideous and their gardens often without real taste? Some of the women help women's institutes a little. Part of the help is of the sort that may one day, perhaps, split the women's institute movement.

Our hamlet had no women's institute till we started one. The gentry ladies alight in the place at election times only. Flowers and green stuff can be had from them, however, for the decoration of the church, and two sisters give a yearly school tea—in the school or in a barn, never at the big house.

Two years ago one of the heads of these families 'kindly consented' to be district councillor, but he 'never goes'.

Another is a county councillor and goes pretty regularly. He opens his mouth when farmer members respectfully pray his aid to keep down rates. The local paper, having no Radical rival, leaves some of his doings unreported.

All three Betters are playing with satisfaction at a feeble feudalism. There is an unbridgeable gap between their families and everybody else.

I cannot see how, by any kind of word play, the influence of these three families can be made out to be good. Considered agriculturally or sociologically, their departure from the district would be a good thing—if, in the present haphazard way of doing things in rural England, there were any certainty that the people who took their place would be of more service to the community.

Whether we have regard to their physical life or their mental processes, the people I have tried to describe are blameable.

It is not only that they do not earn their salt. The silliness, the incompetent prodigality or the meanness of their life demoralizes the men and women and lads who work for them.

Out of doors, their relationships with their 'inferiors' are nowadays more grotesque than intolerable, for in 1925 the 'inferiors' laugh.

None the less there has been impressed on the minds of cottagers and farmers a false image of a 'gentleman' which it will take generations wholly to eradicate.

Upon the farmers, who feel in a vague way that they are maintaining the national safety as they range themselves dutifully and agreeably on the side of high respectability and touch their hats to landed gentlemen, these melancholy products of our social evolution have long exercised an influence which has been as harmful as far-reaching.

The snobbery of the hunting field, vaunted so ignorantly for its democratic sentiment, is not all the gentry are answerable for.

At puppy-walk luncheons and Hunt dinners—gentry at their tables, farmers at theirs—in speeches to men leading isolated lives, who have read even less than they have done, they have constantly inculcated the view that British farming—that is, the production of food at the doors of a congeries of the largest centres of population in the world—is ill-used by the State. During the period in which Free Trade farmers in Holland and Denmark have been

developing their agricultural systems to the highest pitch of efficiency, and have been placing their products on the British market below the noses of our farmers and their party patrons, the spouting of this enervating and ignoble doctrine by the farmers' 'betters' has been persisted in.

In what sense have these people been, are these people now, the hamlet's betters? What have their opportunities of good health and comfortable housing, of education and travel, taught them by which the hamlet has benefited? If they were sundered from our rural body politic to-morrow, would it not be advantageous to it?

*

When I look at this, after the consideration I am making it a practice to give to each of these Chapters, my wish is to have had the skill to write without even the appearance of acridity, uncharitableness or inaccuracy. The appearance, I say, because the facts cannot be gainsaid.

The picture is wholly true as I see it.

And difficult though it is to know one's fellow-creatures, it will be agreed that the picture is the picture that has been drawn again and again, by masters, in our best fiction and throughout the volumes of *Punch*.

Happily, there are hamlets which present a different aspect from my own.

What I have written is true, however, of many hamlets, and, if this is not understood, things of worth to England will continue their rapid decay.

But I hear some one ejaculate in protest, I can almost ejaculate myself, 'The English spirit is friendly, the English countryside is a friendly countryside.'

We love to think so. We can delude ourselves for days, for weeks, for months it may be, that it is so.

But what is this friendliness? It is like the pleasantness of the Church, from which the Church is dying. This friendliness and this pleasantness are based on dominion. 'No one so easily led, no one so friendly and pleasant, 'when I have my own way.

This friendliness and pleasantness are based on an order of society the foundations of which are known to be slipping.

This local gentry of ours is the flotsam of feudalism.

Like some ladylike folk-dancing, it is a humourless make-believe.

What is supposedly English about it, what is called healthy and breezy and jolly, succeeds mostly in being sad.

It is an assumption of rank, a requirement of consideration which is without a just basis of knowledge, intelligence, and duty.

It is the arrogance of the undisciplined natural man, who, in an imperfect social system, has bought his way clear of some of the discipline and obligations of life.

Whether the arrogance is the arrogance of a sham squirearchy, discovered to be short of brains and public spirit, or the arrogance of the plumber to the plumber's mate, who brings along his tools a footstep behind him, or merely my and your constant acceptance of 'Yessir' and 'If you please'm' without invariably deserving it, it has got to be worked out of us.

CHAPTER 5

THE LESSER BETTERS

Who does not know his inexhaustible patience of abuses that only torment others; his apologetic word for beliefs that may perhaps not be so precisely true as one might wish, and institutions that are not altogether so useful as some might think possible; his cordiality towards progress and improvement in a general way, and his coldness or antipathy to each progressive proposal in particular; his pygmy hope that life will one day become somewhat better, punily shivering by the side of his gigantic conviction that it might well be infinitely worse?—*John Morley*

I SHALL try to write down what matters about the strangers. But, except for the wheelwright and two old men whose labouring is done, everybody over thirty is a stranger.

The parson is a stranger.

The schoolmistress cycles every morning from her own village three miles away.

The two farmers and the elderly and middle-aged labourers and their wives were born outside the hamlet.

It is a queer thing to think of, a country place inhabited by people so few of whom belong to it.

What happened to the others? If we knew, we should know something at first hand of the story of the depopulation of southern Britain.

But about some of those in the village now. Miss Hinkson is one of the types of refugee from life to be found in most villages. Her father was a country rector. Her mother's brother was an M.P. knight. She has a small allowance, so small that since the War she cannot afford a maid. She goes to every service at the church, but is not a frequenter of the vicarage. Every summer she spends a month or six weeks with a brother's children while their father and mother have their holiday. She reads little beyond the *Daily Telegraph*. It comes to her by post, a day old, from a

clerical brother-in-law. Her only recreation is a little flower-gardening. Not lack of strength but excess of gentility has led her to give the cultivation of her few vegetables into the care of a labourer. She looks forward, I think, to her chat with him, enjoys it more, probably, than her cycling. Her bicycle is used for shopping only. She calls on none of her 'equals'. For the rest, she vegetates, and feels safe.

One might be sorrier for a lonely and narrow existence, which has made Miss Hinkson a little odd, and, when she meets anyone to talk to, unnaturally voluble, if she had not been a dodger of life; if, though possessed of ability and vigour of body, she had not chosen to remain dependent rather than make some kind of effort to earn or part-earn her living; if it had not been chiefly something in herself, not easily distinguishable from selfishness, which had pushed away from her the chances of marriage.

She is the victim of an era in which eldest daughters were sacrificed on parental altars. Brought up as the satellite of her parents, deprived of animating education (while her brothers went to the university and her younger sister got herself married), and given the wizened conception of life that dwells so often with ecclesiasticism, is it any wonder that she has been fearful of everything but 'certainty', has put out her thinking to be done for her, and has come to the stage of 'considering her own interests first'? Who did sin, this woman or her parents? A later age will know how to make something of a girl who begins life with health, good looks, a sense of humour, and some natural kindliness.

Even as it is, Miss Hinkson takes ailing fellow-cottagers a bunch of flowers or a small cake, and enjoys unfeignedly their flavour-some confidences. She is not of that variety of feminine small gentrydom, which, when reduced to living in a cottage, sees the gaffers and the gammers and all the doings of the parson in a sentimental haze of unreality, and, because of an unwillingness to face facts and consider actions, effects little by its benevolences.

Miss Hinkson must be held to 'know how to talk to' labouring families and vicarage alike, and 'get respect'. The vicar has

noted a determined eye and chin and a certain show of temper, and does not forget the late Sir Joshua connection.

The labourers' wives are not unconscious of merit in respectably approving of a lady who has shortened neither her hair nor her skirts. With that appreciation of superior manners, which often seems to be keener in village women than in village men, the cottage matrons value the difference between Miss Hinkson's phrasing and their own, between the tone of her voice and their own, and feel the refinement not only of her air but of her flourishing flower borders.

With children, however, the occupant of Corner Cottage has neither natural nor acquired ways. When she chided the school youngsters for their shouting and their apple-thieving they made faces at her and flung stones at her closet.

The men of the hamlet think she should be 'with her own people in a house suitable, 'stead of cottage-snatching; 'taint nat'ral nor seeming her fashion of existence'.

But a just Heaven, looking down on the world's strange life of ignorance, striving, and make-believe, will give marks to Miss Hinkson, not only for her love of the country, her indomitable flower-gardening, her laughter, and her little presents to her neighbours, but for the resolution she has shown in living alone and keeping all spick and span. If she is 'not dressed'—and I am sure she is never indecently undressed—she answers the door to no one. How often a man who lives by himself in the country gets an outcast look, washes less, and makes an intimate of whisky or of smoker's sore throat!

If overcrowding were not such a misery in the hamlet, Miss Hinkson, who must live somewhere, and was, after all, born in the country, might be considered to have made good her claim to occupy a dwelling among us. It is clear, however, that she cannot be relied on to initiate, to back or to hail with joy any forward movement of the community.

But she has not stood for absolute torpidity. The hamlet has had some benefits from her stay.

If she should ever leave us, some large family will be very glad

indeed to have her cottage, but before Farmer Horridge's Ford takes her to the station, she will receive more than one little gift of eggs or flowers, and her departure will be made from a group of fellow-cottagers, with friendly faces and waving hands, and down the road she will get a cap-lift from men in the fields.

*

One of our back-to-the-land-ers has a small holding, the other a pleasant old house (mentioned by Cobbett), with a farm.

The owner of the house and farm had some training as an electrical engineer. But his father left him an income, and just before the War he came into another £400 a year. So he decided to live in the country, and bought The Chase.

He and his wife, with an intelligent bailiff, have done their best to make the farm pay. But lack of general and local experience, and continuous dear buying and cheap selling, have put measurable profits beyond the Trewitts' reach. When their correspondence with many estate agents and their prospecting of various country-sides enable them to secure a house without a farm—they have no children—they will leave the parish.

Of their way of life little need be said.

They supplement their *Morning Post* with the *Saturday Review*, have the fuller Mudie book supply, and read a great deal of fiction, the gossipier memoirs, and well-illustrated travel. They do themselves well at every meal in the day, they made no physical and very little monetary sacrifice during the War, they never go to church, they have no part whatever in the life of the hamlet, and they really believe it to be a misfortune that the children at the school are taught more than reading, writing and arithmetic. They often go up to London, and they are frequently away in their comfortable car, visiting the minor county.

Their agricultural achievement has been lower than the farmers', and their social standard has been no higher.

*

Mr. Hulse, proprietor of the Imperial Poultry Farm, was a stolid, stockish accountant who kept hens at Acton, and did not get on with his wife. He was slightly wounded six months after

the beginning of the War, returned to his spouse on a new footing, and hired a small off-farm (with an ugly house) at the far end of the hamlet in order to start a poultry 'plant'.

Mrs. Hulse was the daughter of the proprietor of a Ramsgate hotel, and had aspirations towards the films. But such thoughts are done with. The pair have poultry-farmed with an industry which has been ant-like in its intensity and its limitations. The accountancy training made book-keeping enjoyable. Mrs. Hulse's hereditary aptitude with feeding stuffs had also its expression.

But in spite of their joint gifts, they soon lost their money. A timely legacy encouraged them to keep on two years longer.

They profited by the experience they had bought—like the Trewitts, they have no children—and by the high prices food supplies were fetching. Now, with two pupils, an addiction to poultry shows, and good fortune in selling sittings and in disposing of cockerels with toes and earlobes of the right tints, they rub along, well fed in a mean way, with few expenses, their freehold almost their own, perfect physical and mental contentment, and a *Daily Mail* in the evenings.

Beyond the employment of a three-quarter wit for help in the poultry houses, and a decent slattern for their washing-up and clothes washing, they have no relationship with the hamlet. Again like the Trewitts, they go neither to church nor to the parish meeting—the hamlet is not populous enough to have a parish council—and are seldom seen at any of the entertainments in the neighbourhood.

They have set the place an example in industry. But it has also been an example in money-grubbing. 'Damn braces, bless relaxes,' would be meaningless to them. They have developed no social conscience whatever. As for their industry, it is doubtful if industry is the first virtue that the hamlet needs lessons in.

It may be said that Hulse did his bit in the War. No doubt. But if the War had not happened he would have separated from his wife. He had plodded successfully at London county council evening-school lessons in Spanish, and was topping off with Berlitz in order to slip away to South America.

CHAPTER 6

THE NEW SALT OF OUR EARTH

It is with me an invaluable property in any man to call a spade a spade.—*Creevey*

THERE is no particular virtue in leaving London to live in a cottage, a farmhouse or a manor. Those who make the mistake of doing so, when outer suburbia or a garden suburb or one of those remoter be-villaed villages within an hour's season-ticket ride of town would have suited them much better, are seldom at their most virtuous.

Further, of more than a few of any chance dozen men and women of assorted social grades who have come to live in the country can it be said that they are not, in effect, fugitives from life? Can urban-born-and-bred people who are unequal to their world, aid country-born-and-bred people who have been unequal to theirs? Shall the townsman blind open the eyes of the countryman blind?

Shall men and women who have sought their own good in a city seek others' good in a village? These people have been living to themselves in the suburbs. They mean to live to themselves more than ever in the shires.

Their minds are set on the impossible—on emancipation from life's discipline, on gaining what cannot be found, 'happiness' outside themselves. They have been leaners on London, and now they would lean on 'Nature'.

Why should their characters grow more meritorious in the country? They will rub brains with no one. They will be free from the criticism of their 'social equals'. They have forced themselves away from the restrictions and stimulus of life.

If eating and drinking be their bane, they will eat and drink more than ever. If mental sloth, uncurbed selfishness, idleness or sen-

suality afflicts them, if discontent is in their breath, how shall they be healed?

How do such people look in the eyes of the hamlet?

What is the hamlet to gain from such people, beyond money in the pockets of its wiliest?

Are not the hamlet dwellers, more civilized in some essentials than the townees, shrewd enough to realize that the strangers have arrived in its world because they have failed to fit themselves to their own?

Who, the hamlet asks with confidence, would not live in London if he could?

The hamlet, facing a starker reality than is bared amid the props and stays of cities, has no patience with urban megrims.

The worst of the new-comers may be seen from time to time reaching out their hands to lay hold of what does not belong to them.

The best of the new-comers, the hamlet knows, are walking in a vain show. They are entering lightly on the practice of the oldest craft in Britain, the cultivation of the earth and the care of its cattle, a craft at which experts, who are of a longer line of experts than the men who pursue any town calling, often fail.

These amiable *immigrés*' planning and spending are often harmful to their neighbours. In their personal relationships with the hamlet they are fortunate if within twenty years they know the people. But whatever mistakes of their training they may make, the public conscience counts their lives to them for righteous if in their hearts there is kindness.

Happily, we have in the villages not a few newcomers who are radiating in the country the goodness they would radiate anywhere.

Lest our countryside should seem to you, from my accounts, drab all over, let me mention three of our own new-comers who have a concern, in the Quaker phrase, to help in the building of the rural Jerusalem. It is true that they are more than walking distance

away. But when we want their help, the motor, that big factor in rural civilization, brings them in half an hour or three-quarters.

*

Joan Hutton, the wife of one of the most enlightened yeomen in England, is a new-comer to our shire, but because of her spouse and her own dalesman blood, she had advantages in grasping rural problems which well-intentioned and studious ex-townees lack.

These advantages would not have taken her far, however, if she had not had a first-rate education, if she had not gone through the mill of a complete training for a profession, if she had not travelled and read widely, if she did not buy books and papers as well as receive her London Library allowance, if she had not the passion to tell or hear some new thing, if she were not a woman of her hands and of a line of skilled housewives, if, above all, she were not big in her nature, and an actual instead of a sentimental democrat.

Joan Hutton seldom has 'ma'am' from her maids. But they stay with her till they marry, they work admirably, and, like other young women of the village, they copy their mistress's sane way of dressing, and gradually imbibe something of her public spirit.

The efficiency with which Mrs. Hutton arranges the bothersome small details of a tea-meeting or the visit of the county council upholstery or bee teacher; the way in which she has led her women's institute towards all sorts of energetic and unconsciously meritorious action; her obliviousness to 'class' as long as there is character, sincerity or skill; her capacity for leaving people alone and not gushing; her industry, her realization of the fact that a sound historical knowledge of the way in which our rural folk have been dealt with is necessary for wise thought and effort on their behalf, her sound health, her——

But there she is, plain enough it would seem. I can think of little wrong with her but her constant cigarette.

*

Captain Pender came out of the Navy with an eye and half an ear gone, forty-three years behind him, a liking for music, sketch-

ing and folk dancing, and a modest, secret determination to keep on doing his bit.

He says he's no good at all on committees because he's been accustomed not to confer but to command. But, within his car's reach, few committees seem to get themselves formed without him.

He is breezily down on what he calls professional optimists, political turkey buzzards, dead parsons, and sectional action.

Because the public-house signs of his ancient village were ugly he has redrawn the emblems on the swinging boards of the George, the Saracen, and the Pig and Whistle, and he has plans for getting a cheery effect in the colouring of the workhouse railings.

It does not trouble him at all if, when he is invited to a village, his song or his lecture is to twenty or even twelve people, including children, the night being wet. The single wondering blue eye he turns on you when you give him a vote of thanks makes you feel uncomfortable.

He was born in the next county of horse-and-hound, curtained-square-pew folk, and takes rather a general view of the agricultural labourer—his own village is almost a small town. He is rather shy, and economics are not to his taste. But he says that what he and his wife want in order to make them reasonably content with life must be very much what working people want, and that 'what gets my goat, gets theirs, and that's enough to get along with, enough to get heaps of things changed that want changing, if not this year then sometime soon, if one keeps dropping in an idea now and then, and lending a hand.' 'Anybody can understand the masses,' I have heard him say, 'if he understands himself.'

How he gets all his committee secretarying done, and all his helping people with their electric light and wireless outfits and their gardening, I don't know.

Besides, he's troubled with all sorts of problems. As, for example, 'Just how should I feel if I steamed over one of the least useful of the useless parsons that have drifted into this lagoon?' It is shocking to hear a man who reads the lessons on Sunday asking: 'How is it that when I see a church I feel good, and when I see a clergyman I don't?'

One of the foundations of Captain Pender's success among the young fellows is the six rounds he boxed with the county bobby at the village fête the year he came out of the Navy.

■

If I wrote down Henry Vesey's right name you would say, 'Oh, I have read some of his books.' None of them has had less than half a column in *The Times Literary Supplement*. He wishes *The Times Literary Supplement* far enough, for H.M. Inspector of Taxes for our district takes it in—don't be surprised, the market-town grocer gets *Nature*—and that official cannot be got to understand how Vesey is without an income to match *The Times Literary Supplement* appreciation; that, indeed, the volumes of Vesey's you yourself have read—come now—were borrowed from the library.

■

What this novelist-poet has done very well with is pigs on the open-air plan, and sometimes he lets at three guineas a week a cottage he has built. He also edits the *Beekeepers' Monitor* for £120 a year.

One of the excuses he makes for his ruralizing is his 'orchestra'. He had seventy instrumentalists and singers at his last display in his village hall. Seventy cramped the audience, which spread from the seats to the floor, the window-sills and choice places outside beneath the windows. Music and politics are what the labourer needs, Vesey says, and his neighbours give him almost as closely packed public meetings as concerts.

Mrs. Hutton, Captain Pender and Henry Vesey are not scheming to get into Parliament. If they lived in our hamlet they might sometimes feel they ought to.

CHAPTER 7

FARMER BLOSS

Truly our business is to speak things.—*Cromwell*

STEPHEN BLOSS farms in our manner as much land as would content a score of the twenty thousand Danish farmers who thrive on three dozen acres apiece. He is always on horseback.

One evening I had returned from a visit to Rothamsted—a feather in our national cap, as you know, for it is not only the source of much of our soundest agricultural science, but the oldest agricultural station in the world, such a veteran that it was described by Dickens.

In came Bloss.

I told him where I had been. I spoke of the classic Rothamsted plots, each of which had had a special treatment that had lasted for seventy years.¹ I mentioned that I had not failed to visit the famous plot on which wheat had been grown for seventy years without manure of any sort (the plot having had nothing but fallowing and tillage). I showed Bloss an ear of wheat which I had been allowed to pluck.

‘It is, I suppose,’ I said, ‘the most remarkable ear of wheat in our county to-night. Of course, one cannot expect much, but it’s a fair ear, isn’t it?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘it’s fair to middlin’.’ ‘Well,’ I asked, ‘what do you think about it all?’ Bloss took his pipe out of his mouth for greater emphasis, and said, ‘Why, I don’t believe it.’

Once, when kind, simple, conscientious, unselfish, talkative Mrs. Bloss came to see us, she had amiably primed herself to make conversation with me. ‘I’ve brought, for you to see, some of these Children’s Own Books that the children are getting,’ she

¹ Hoos Field, wheat after fallow (without manure, 1851 and since), yields about 15 bushels per acre dressed grain, and 52 lb. of offal grain. The average wheat yield in England is about 31 bushels.

began. 'There's some strange pieces in them. What do you think?—they do say that coal comes from wood. I could hardly believe that, could you?'

I gave such explanation as I was capable of.

'Well, now,' she ran on, 'the wonderful things that did happen long ago. I make no doubt it's all true, but (*laughing*) it'd be no use, I can tell you, the children or me telling my husband. They don't easily take in Steve.'

That is one aspect of Bloss.

His wife has had four sorts of trouble with him.

'First,' she said to me last week—why last week you shall learn later—'first there was the by-blow, if you'll pardon the word, that he had before our marriage. Well, that could easily happen to any young man, I suppose. But they expect us women to keep straight, don't they? I can't think it's a nice thing for a respectably connected man to do, and his parents, being at the Grange, and the chief people in the village, they felt it. But there, I could not but be sorry for the poor girl, for it was a drag on her in her places, always to be sending money to her grandmother for it. And though we were not well off when we married, I'd not have grudged Stephen doing more for the girl, but five pounds is all he'd pay, though I spoke about it times I did, not during the day, when he had things on his mind, but quietly at night. And then the girl got married. But her poor little mite, without any father like. Often I've wished I could have sent clothes or something.'

Then Bloss had gradually 'taken' more and more. In coming home drunk from market he once overturned his gig. He has also been thrown twice from his horse. Of late years at home he has sometimes drunk himself not only into moroseness but into violence.

With this drunkenness there has been, latterly, slackness in his farming, an obstinate refusal to delegate anything to his wife or his son, and, necessarily, avoidable losses, the harder for his wife to bear because her bit of money was sunk in the purchase of the home farm.

Beyond all this, patient Mrs. Bloss has been worn out by having

too large a family, by having been, in twenty-six years of married life, not twenty-six days and nights away from Bloss, and by the ill example his drinking has set the boys.

Mrs. Bloss has suffered also from her husband's tight-fistedness. In later years she has even felt a little uncomfortable at times over that 'nearness' as it affected some of Steve's workpeople.

There was old Simon Parley, who was turned off for a trifle, after working on the same farm, and ordinarily working well, for thirty years. There were two other decent workers, whose wages Bloss reduced at the earliest signs of lessened vigour.

Nor did Mrs. Bloss quite like some of the men not being put on in the mornings until they had lost a quarter-day's money, because it was wet. They sat out there in the shed for anybody to see. And it is the fact, I know, that Bloss has always taken advantage of the weight his big farmer's word has carried with smaller employers, to pay the lowest possible wages.

It is not at all difficult, however, to account for Bloss.

He is not mean. He is stubborn, ignorant, insensitive, traditional. He pays the lowest wages, just as he puts down 2s. 6d. on a subscription list to which I am expected to add a guinea. He has been brought up to esteem money, to make good bargains, and to avoid every risk of being had.

He has probably never heard of the law of supply and demand. But he has a like formula, and he regards it as natural and praiseworthy. His rule of life, except that it has been devised for a narrower world, has not been so unlike Carnegie's. What Andrew said to me once in my twenties was, 'Young man, don't you go in the face of the law of supply and demand, or you'll get left every time.'

To understand Bloss one must go back to his training.

There is, to begin with, the education that was thought good enough for him. The great, wise, and eminent of his boyhood spent on fighting in Ashanti and Afghanistan some of the money that might have gone to the development of his mind and morals.

Bloss started life with natural manners, a fine constitution—or his drinking would have done for him—and a sense of humour. Was

it not he who, spying as he rode along, a notorious sleeper-out and poacher moving along a ditch, called out, 'Gatherin' vi'lets, Jarge?'

But Bloss's education did not give him much more than skill in doing sums, the last thing, perhaps, that his character needed.

He took over completely the family notions of money-making, of the rich and the poor, and of the relationship of farmers and labourers. Neither by after-school instruction, in his malleable teens, nor by reading, was his mind brought into contact with any other notions or with a wider world.

When he left off working for his father, married, and, with his parent's 'name at the bank,' began farming on his own account, his new life gave money, men, and women into his control, and the opportunity of indulgence. When some one spoke of the number of children he had, he said choicely, 'They should chain up the bull'.

His shooting and hunting were less to him than the satisfaction of matching his wits against labourers, fellow-farmers and dealers.

What ought to have had an influence on Bloss at the critical period of his marriage and of setting up in business—the opportunity of his teens having been missed—was the Church at his door. The Church might have encouraged and braced Bloss, and helped his wife. It made him a churchwarden.

Bloss had his second chance, the Church had its second chance, when the War came. Since Bloss had reached manhood and become a farmer on his own account he had read nothing. 'I once read a book before I came here,' he told me, 'but it made my head ache.'

If Bloss had read nothing, neither had he heard anything from politician or parson that had touched him.

He had made money. He had been a hard ruler of his labourers. His heart was a good deal seared. His mind was nearly closed. Alcohol had almost mastered him.

But the unexpectedness, the immensity, the far-reachingness of the War, the shock it gave to all his conceptions, and the call to part first with three, and then with four, of his sons, roused Bloss.

It did more. It solemnified him. For the first few months of the War, Bloss was a different man.

He stopped drinking. He cut off one market a week, and returned early from the other two markets. He worked harder. He put his hand deeper in his pocket than he had ever done in his life. He surprised farmer friends and other people by the feeling with which he spoke of the sacrifices a man ought to make. He subscribed for a creditable amount of War Loan, and—there was ever a bigness about Bloss, for all his keenness in getting the better in a deal—denounced some of his neighbours who took the opportunity to make large profits in their sales of straw and hay to the Government.

The angry fashion in which Bloss handed back the milk-bill money of the wife of a soldier who some years before had offended him by joining the agricultural workers' union; the way in which, without saying a word, he sent two men into the garden of a cow-man recruit and cut down an elm that, for six years, the man had complained ate the goodness out of his ground; the frequency with which rabbits were left at the cottages that had men at the front or afloat: these things were marked in the hamlet.

One of his boys in France, another away in the Mediterranean, a third in Egypt, the news of the gathering of so many nations against Germany, and the interest in and importance of peoples with other religions than ours: these things gave Bloss a new notion of the size and significance of the world.

When his youngest lad flew over his farm in an aeroplane his joy and pride were great. He felt as if he were beginning life again. He thought of things he had seldom thought of, and of some he had never thought of. He privately nicked his riding crop for the month he had gone almost without whisky.

But the Church had neither message nor brotherly aid for the awakened sinner. It knew only the churchwarden, gave him only a theology he didn't quite believe.

The flesh was weak, life was solitary, the War was long, and Bloss's acquaintances who drank did not like his abstinence, and pressed drink on the struggling man. The flame of a new hope,

ill-tended, flickered, fell, and went out; and one Sunday evening the churchwarden came to his front pew drunk.

By the end of the War, Bloss, who had had two sons killed and lost a nurse daughter, whose hospital was bombed, had made a great deal of money and was deep in the slough from which he had stepped in the autumn of 1914. There he remains, churchwarden still, and on his home farm there is a mortgage that may any day be called in.

If I know a little of the strivings of Bloss—who died last week—it is because, when his wife was driven to come for my help a month ago, and I stayed all night at High Oaks, I saw him in tears, and received from him confidences. A week later, on the night he came to an end, he told his wife that she was to offer me his two old flails I had liked the feel of.

CHAPTER 8

J. P., DOWELLITE, AND CONSTABLE

Not with the leaven of malice, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.—1 *Cor.* vii. 8

THE late Stephen Bloss's farm is to be taken over by the mortgagee, a large farmer, who, though he has 175 acres in our parish, lives in the next hamlet. Besides being a farmer, he is a corn and seed merchant, a miller, a tile maker, the owner of the Junction Hotel, a brewer, and a J.P. He has got on by his astuteness, industry and physique, by a geniality which has no relation to generosity, and by being always a business man.

As his father was a farmer-merchant with brains and enterprise, Henry Richardson got a better schooling than most farmers' sons.

Further, a man who trades largely in seeds, as Richardson does, must travel up and down the kingdom, must deal with men as able as or abler than he is, and must know all about the ingenuities of seed cleaning, as well as something of seed growing, and the work which is being done in cereal breeding. Such a man must now and then read more than newspapers.

And during the years in which Richardson has been a magistrate, and has had a first-class season ticket half across England to London, and has come in touch with new notions and ways, he has been quick in the uptake. Had his fibre been a little different, the opportunities that he has had might have touched his imagination, widened his sympathies, and cultivated his mind to such a degree as to make him less self-seeking than he is. They have made him one of the ablest farmers in the county, and one of its cleverest and most successful middlemen.

Richardson has seldom initiated anything for anyone's benefit but his own (in the end), and he has never made a public stand for anything but 'economy'. He is merely a member of most things

that people join, and a careful giver to most things that people give to. His father was a Wesleyan; he, as a Churchman, appears occasionally at ruridecanal meetings, and seems to have some satisfaction in calling the vicar 'Harrap' and in recalling the table-talk at his lunch to the bishop when 'his lordship' came over to a confirmation.

But a certain timidity creeps over him when his silent Yorkshire wife smiles.

His father was a Liberal who had his goods taken for tithe. But Richardson calls himself a Conservative, and for two years past has taken the *Morning Post* instead of *The Times*. In so well-entrenched, and, within limits, so well-informed a man, his alarm at the advent of MacDonald's Labour Government was noticeable. If one could believe that Henry Richardson had entirely forgotten the understanding way in which his father used to speak of Joseph Arch, Henry's concern at 'the way agitators are getting at the labourers' might seem a little hypocritical.

But that is, perhaps, too strong a word. Self-deception is not hypocrisy.

Richardson is affable to his workers and all their women folk, but in these hard times has dropped his harvest supper.

He is a bit of a talker about the devotion of this or that old labourer to his father and himself, and about the savings of some of them.

He sees no need for unions, 'wasting the labourers' money and upsetting men that don't want to join'.

'There is a friendly relation between masters and men in farming,' he goes on, 'and wages are ordinarily what the industry will bear. Every decent farmer wants to see his men contented. The cottages are, of course, many of them, poor enough; but what are the rents? Wages are adequate. But farmers must make more or go out of the business. The new rates of pay to the men would be criminal were it not possible to get permits for the old chaps.' Ours was one the low-wage counties.

When, at a little General Election meeting he was chairmaning, the resolution he read out was, to his astonishment, nervously

voted against by two of his men, and there was mumbled talk about what was sauce for the National Farmers' Union goose being sauce for the farm-workers' Union gander, he caught, for the first time, a glimmering of some of the thoughts of the farm workers he had smacked on the back in that unconvincingly jolly way of his, and of the extent to which things are changing in his own hamlet. If he stands for Parliament, as he is hoping to do, he will not get as many votes as he thinks he will, and his failure, 'after all I have tried to do for the district in my small way', will worry him.

When I bought a cow of Richardson, he treated me fairly, and the price he asked when he offered me his second car would not have taken advantage of my inexperience. There might be worse neighbours.

His son, on advice rashly solicited from a fellow-magistrate, was first sent to Bedales. But some of the notions which the youth unfolded to his parents, on his first holiday, quickly showed Richardson that 'that's all wrong', and now 'my son is at Radley'.

*

The open blue eyes, the tanned skin, the straight back, the ingenuousness, the cheerful good nature, the busy yet apparently unharassed life of our small farmer, Joseph Horridge, are an argument for the agricultural life with every townsman who hires his Ford at the station.

Like so many other things in the country, Horridge is not just what, in the stranger's eyes, he seems to be.

There is nowhere near us a harder master in the dull, unseeing, self-centred, unimaginative way. There is not a narrower mind. There is not a man who has been less helpful to his neighbours.

During the year he was overseer he collected $4\frac{1}{2}d.$ for the postage of a letter and three postcards.

Oblivious to the cost of the young 'vet's' education, he tried to beat down the fee for the unpleasant and somewhat dangerous job of completing the imperfect castration of a grown bought-in horse.

When he asked the carpenter belonging to the next village to

fix the price of a job he was to do for him, Mrs. Horridge, walking in her husband's footsteps, said to the man, 'You ought to make it cheaper as I have given you tea.'

If religion failed to get hold of Farmer Bloss, religion of a sort seems to be answerable in some degree for the arrested development of Farmer Horridge. He is an adherent of a business-like American sect, which, by advertising of the patent-medicine pattern, has gathered together thousands of subscribing members in humble life who believe in the word-by-word inspiration of the Scriptures, that the Dowellites must keep themselves apart from the adherents of other creeds, and that the end of life on this earth, bringing damnation to non-Dowellites, is imminent.

It is an illustration of the complexity of human character that Horridge, so 'near' in his financial dealings with his men and everybody else, brought an evangelist of his sect to the hamlet green in order that the labourers might be harangued about their souls. And there is this to be said for him, that the milk he sells is fairly clean.

If Horridge had had the right sort of moral training and a sufficient schooling he would not have been caught by the illiterate earthiness of the Dowellite book canvassers and their tracts. But all the instruction he got, on weekdays, was in a dismal, poorly run Church school, and, on Sundays, from a parson who taught little effectively.

If from your twenties you had never read a book, and seldom a paper, except for the agricultural markets; if you had never been to a lecture or a public meeting; if you had never seen a play or heard any good music, and had never thought of voting; if you had learnt little from your fellows because, as much as possible, you kept out of the way of sinners; if you fixed all your mind and strength on making money out of beasts, with the help of ignorant men, rewarded at the lowest possible rates; if your religion relieved you of your share of responsibility for the world around you, would you be so very unlike Horridge?

But what a reflection you would be, and Horridge is, on our present stage of civilization!

And what a fine thing it would be for the countryside and the towns if the lowest common denominator of organized agriculture had exactly its own way in strengthening the hold of Horridge, Richardson and Bloss on the community!

If I get worried about it all, I think of Joan Hutton's farmer husband (page 41), and revive my happy recollections of George Ware's enlightenment and the humble righteousness which mark his farming and his relations with his men and his neighbours (p. 129).

And I remember with gladness that there are other farmers like him.

*

I also think of Gurry.

I had been in my new house a few weeks when a man in a tweed suit, with a motor-cycle, called to see me, a big, grizzled man with penetrating grey eyes, a lined, healthy, curiously contemplative face, and a winning voice.

Without saying a word, he took out of an inside pocket a circular for me and a receipt book for himself. Then, having given me a moment to glance at the circular, he opened his mouth: 'Will you be so kind, sir, as to subscribe to—' I have forgotten what the humanitarian league was called. I had never heard of it. But it was impossible to let an anonymous seven-and-six stand between me and the smile on the face of so spirited a man. So I gave him the money with pleasure and said, 'Surely I have seen you before?' 'Yes, sir,' he answered, 'I'm the constable.' Such is the marvel wrought by a helmet and uniform.

P.C. Gurry is a vegetarian. So is his wife. So are his four children. He borrowed from me a book which was not about vegetarianism, and he gave me his *Daily Herald*. He said he had read one of my own books, and would be glad if I would kindly give an address, 'on the lines of it', two Sundays later, at the 'Brotherhood' at the Junction. He was the secretary.

I agreed, and he was gone in seven minutes, not one of which had been wasted.

I did not see P.C. Gurry again until seven months later—his

duty took him through the hamlet in the night—when he came to see me to say that he was leaving the force.

He had always meant to leave as soon as he could, 'so as to be freer for public work', and now his wife's father had died and left them more than they had hoped to have from him.

So Gurry had bought from Mr. Richardson (a little expensively, I thought) a small piece of deep, blackish ground, that had been a hop garden, and a good cottage near it. Gurry said that as his father had been a market gardener and his own two boys had been apprenticed to 'a good glass man', and they were to be close to the railway station, they would 'manage to make as much money as is necessary'.

But three-quarters of the talk of this energetic man was about agricultural co-operation and 'a fine farmer ten miles on the other side of the Junction'. This portent had always paid his men a bit more than others, his wife had set a women's institute going, and his out-of-the-common son and daughter had started, the one boy scouts, and the other girl guides. 'There is a little circle there of farmers and farmers' sons, and one or two market gardeners, who believe in the future of the land. They are taking up-to-date papers, and getting on the parish and district councils, and doing things. They have every one of the county council experts visiting them—the county council hedger has improved the whole look of that part of the county—and there is an outspoken clergyman, and any useful person who comes to the district speaks in his church, but the bishop has let drop a hint more than once that—'

I need not go into it all.

CHAPTER 9

THE BEECH LEAF

Our soul is, above half of it, earth and stone in its affections and distempers.—*Jeremy Taylor*

I HAVE heard of only one Milsom about here—Gilbert Milsom, who lives with a sister in one of the worst cottages in the hamlet. But the churchyard is full of Milsoms, farmer Milsoms with headstones for which good prices were paid. The Milsoms have died out.

Similarly, we have only one Gundry to give a thought to a score or two of dead Gundrys, lying with the Milsoms on the pleasant south side of the church—our labourers have been buried on the bleak north side.

It seems almost indelicate to speak of Miss Gundry as Phœbe.

She was born in a 'genteel' world. Her 'mamma'—the wife of a well-off miller, maltster and farmer—died of 'decline' when Phœbe was seven. The only other child, tepid James, was two. Solid comfort was the portion of the Gundrys. Within ten miles six farms were owned by uncles or cousins. 'Mamma' left gentle memories, a spinet, sewed pictures, some Chippendale, and many well-filled chests of drawers scented with musk.

When the miller-maltster-farmer died, after being nursed by Phœbe from the time she left 'finishing school' till she was thirty, he left all in the care of James. Phœbe, who revered men, never doubted the wisdom of this.

James married. Phœbe began a life of long visits to relatives.

For ten of her years she 'waited on' Aunt Raven, the widow of 'mamma's' doctor brother. Aunt Raven had a sealskin coat, also a high dog-cart with a faint red line on its deep-blue surface. She lacked humour and died importantly. In her will was this item: 'To my niece Phœbe Gundry, ten pounds and my gold drop ear-rings'. Phœbe was filled with surprise, pleasure,

gratitude, and an earnest desire to 'mourn' her aunt becomingly.

During the quarter of a century following the death of Phœbe's father, brother James managed to fritter away house, mill, malting and farm. He then set up in a small way of business in Dalston. In a letter to Phœbe, explaining that her share of her father's estate had gone, he wrote pompously that she 'need not be afraid of anything happening' to her while he lived. But neither then nor later did he send her any money.

By this time every one of the half-dozen local Gundrys had come to grief or moved away. There remained only Phœbe and a widowed aunt, Mrs. Bunt.

By a series of misfortunes such as had pursued brother James, Mrs. Bunt had lost all but her pine furniture, upholstered in horse-hair, and her china and other effects that went admirably with it. A son in America sent her four dollars a week. With this income and Phœbe in attendance, Aunt Bunt deposited herself in a rent-free alms-cottage on land that her husband's people had farmed for five generations.

Aunt Raven had been exacting, but there had been compensations in comfort, elegance, and repose in living with her. To wait on Aunt Bunt, who had a perfect digestion, a small mind and a big body, meant the surrender of all independence of action.

'Where have you been a-gaddin', gell?' was her continual greeting to Phœbe.

'Upstairs, dear Aunt.'

'An' whatever can you be stayin' upstairs for, all by yourself, and me in my second-best cap at three in the afternoon?'

Aunt Bunt's claim to distinction was the length of her mortal life. Unconsciousness of emotional, intellectual or physical strain brought her to ninety-four. In addition to doing all the work of the cottage, Phœbe had for years dressed and undressed a woman stronger than herself.

After her aunt's death Phœbe lived for a time miraculously. There were a few pounds which she and Mrs. Bunt had managed to lay aside, and there was a small benefaction which a school friend

of Phœbe's began to send punctually every quarter. A beautifully expressed letter acknowledged each instalment of the gift.

A comfortable day dawned for Phœbe and other timid souls when at seventy she could put pride away and meekly claim her old-age pension.

A cousin who loves bright garments, and a more distant connection whose spirit is expressed in rusty black and thick grey, supply Phœbe's wardrobe. In spite of failing sight, the grateful recipient, with painstaking neatness and a borrowed fashion paper, reforms these garments to her taste.

Second-hand shoes might have been a greater difficulty than discarded clothing. Phœbe's thin elegant foot is never easy in cast-offs. But she will say, 'Look how little I really need walk.' Until brother James died, Phœbe squeezed out of her small funds a pair of high-heeled shoes for the visits which, on his rare invitations, she paid to London—without having the price of her ticket sent her.

When James died and left her an allowance for mourning, Phœbe wept sore for 'dear brother'.

If you were in our hamlet on a Sunday at church-time you would easily pick out Phœbe by her walk.

She still points her toes as she was trained to do at the school that taught her deportment and riding. Of the ringleted girl of those long-gone school-days there is left but the faintest shadow. The slimness has become emaciation. The now thin and faded ringlets are packed under a 'cloche' hat that looks ludicrously modern on a Victorian figure.

Even when Phœbe was seventeen and wore muslin frills and pink ribbons her short-sighted hazel eyes were red-rimmed and drawn-looking. To-day she is almost blind. Phœbe has suffered so long from pain in her eyes and her head that she says, 'It makes no matter now, thank you very much; I am quite used to it.'

In her whole life Phœbe has never grumbled or complained, never resented Bunt nor James nor any of her lot. Her ready response to an apology for neglect or forgetfulness of herself or

her needs is always, 'Pray do not mention it.' Her preface to every plan, however simple, is, 'If all's well.'

Many of Phœbe's years have gone, as we have seen, in caring for the more or less ungrateful old or elderly. She was deprived of her portion after a fashion which Mrs. Henry Wood has described for a curious posterity. 'Old maid' was a real reproach in her generation. Now that she is aged and almost sightless, no relative does for her what she did so exquisitely for her own kin.

In a town her lot would be hard. Here in the country the world seems kinder.

Phœbe now sits rent free, but in some dignity of general regard and family furnishings, which include a sewed picture that first simpered on a drawing-room wall of the seventeenth century.

Old Jonas Budd, who worked for a time for her father in the days of plenty, digs her garden for love or duty, or both; but nowadays he cannot get the better of the 'squitch', and the garden could do with at least two loads of manure.

For the smallest imaginable sum an old woman washes for Phœbe the sheets, the wringing of which is now beyond her.

Miss Hinkson calls regularly with flowers from her gay garden.

The rector's wife invites Phœbe to tea once a year.

A new-comer to the parish includes her in various gatherings, and has at times replenished her coal and wood shed.

Farmer Bloss's widow sends Sunday dinners, excusing the 'liberty' on the plea that 'it makes no mite of difference to our joint, and saves Miss Gundry messing around on a Sunday'.

Knowing nothing of snobbery, Phœbe's sweetly meek spirit accepts favours graciously.

Phœbe's biggest thorn was her late alms-cottage neighbour, lusty, lively, ill-tongued, widow Bones. 'Ye may be gentry-born,' says I to she, 'but ye 'ave come down. An' my son Tom, with his plumbing business up in Lunnon, can walk about with his hands in his pockets and send me ten shillin's whenever he likes.'

Poor Phœbe used to blush pitifully every time that terrifying voice intruded on her. But never once did she show ill feeling. Rather did she show the crusty old woman kindness, tending her

when sick, and writing her letters to 'My son Tom'. Perhaps if she had grasped the nettle of envy she would have conquered. But gentleness and long-suffering are fundamental in Phoebe.

Sometimes, however, she dwells on a few moments in her quiet life when she suffered a humiliation that, as she says, can still make her hot at night if she is lying awake.

During the time of the late rector, Phoebe was invited with other grown-ups to attend a magic-lantern meeting for the school-children. At the end of the entertainment there was a distribution of buns and tea. By an oversight Phoebe was given a cup of tea but no bun. She drank the tea and had just given up her cup when there was a second distribution of buns. She accepted one. Alas, she did not know that this second distribution was to mark the close of the evening's programme. The parson at once, to Phoebe's dismay, pronounced the benediction. What was poor Phoebe to do with her bun? No adult but herself had had a bun of the second distribution. Phoebe could not swallow her bun whole. Good manners forbade her to pocket it. She could not return it, for the carriers of the bun baskets were back in their places. It might be seemly for children to leave a treat bun in hand, but not for grown-up, genteel Phoebe. In her distress she furtively hid the bun in her handkerchief. But how could she, so incommoded, go forward and shake hands with the rector's wife? She slunk from the room, feeling that every adult eye and many childish eyes were upon her. As she says, 'If only I had thought of giving the bun to a child!'

'But,' she adds humbly, 'I never do think of the right thing to do or say at an awkward moment until the day afterwards or in the middle of the night.'

Like a clinging beech leaf in winter, Phoebe is now in her eighties. Friends prove kinder to her than her relatives ever were, and her unselfishness and charity of thought enrich the hamlet.

THE TWELVE WHO WERE CALLED

The true and only way is by making public.—*Fox*

WHATEVER the countryside may be in need of, it is not churches. From a windmill near my house I can make out, in clear weather, seven spires.

Seven churches and seven parsons in a small and scantily populated district, seem a liberal provision, over and above all the Nonconformist and meliorist activity. Seven churches and seven parsons ought to be able, ought to have been able, to accomplish something.

Something has been accomplished, no doubt, but how much?

The great difficulty about picturing the Church as it really is in many parts of rural England is not, I think, after considering the matter a long time, the difficulty of making a faithful picture, but the difficulty of making it believable.

If, after all that has been written of late years about farmers and labourers, and all the acquaintance with them that town-dwellers gain as week-enders and holiday-makers, so little of the life and thinking of the masters and men of the hamlets is commonly within the grasp of urban folk, it is in no way surprising that knowledge, or, as the Methodists say, a realizing sense, of some countryside clericalism, should be uncommon.

It is not only that townspeople come very little into touch with the rural clergy. The public imagination is tenanted by a legendary country parson. The simple merit of this personage of our literature sets the least worthy rectory or vicarage in an atmosphere of benevolence, however tenuous.

I wonder what exactly was in the mind of the leader-writer of one of the most responsible of the morning papers who was

dithyrambic the other day on the 'excellence' of the country church, the 'devotion' of its parsons, the 'record of the great English country clergymen that cannot be matched'. No one would doubt for a second the honesty of the writer. No one would doubt that there is some foundation for him to build on. The rural Church has served the turn of many people. And thousands of youngsters who became men of mark have come out of rectories.

But can the leader-writer have looked into two or three of those joint church magazines which are published by the rural deaneries? In these ingenuous productions—surely among the most trustworthy documents we have for forming a correct judgment on the moral and spiritual results of the union of Church and State in our day—the mentality, education, and social, political and spiritual outlook, the preoccupations, habits, and professional life of 'a Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman', are pictured in the most convincing way by the rural clergy themselves, each parson of the district in his own quarter or half-page allowance of print.

There is nothing in the whole periodical world to be compared for feebleness with the combined performance—unless it be some at any rate of the diocesan magazines, to which it may be, 'the great English country clergymen' contribute.

One of the best parsons I know is the Rev. A. B., a man with a red face, a loud voice and a girth. He knows little of theology or of history, and he would readily own that his stock of general information is low. He has no books and, when he is lent one, takes a long time to read it. He buys a Church paper to which he may give ten minutes, and a London daily which is supplied at half-price to the clergy, on which he may spend half an hour. His sermons are poor stuff. He would admit that they are. 'He's not cut out for his job', is the indulgent verdict in his parish, 'but he's a good sort, old parson'. His friendly visits bring comfort in time of bereavement. He is a man of charitable mind. He is a first-class neighbour, helping eagerly and perspiringly with poultry, bees or goats, or at sports. There is not a kinder, more generous or pluckier fellow. When there was an epidemic he was

fearless. Two of his parishioners he 'laid out', and, unwieldy though he is in body, helped to dig the graves, for his sexton has 'the screws' and is slow. He seems to know almost all that is known outside books about the birds, beasts and trees of the district, and was a great walker and a skilful boxer—his name was once in the *Sporting Times*. Every one of his three sons has done well. And his people like him at their bedsides when they come to die.

The Rev. C. D., undersized but fit, is young. His living is a family possession—he is the nephew of a peer—and simony was committed to keep it warm for him while he was failing at examinations. He is no reader—I got the impression myself that he had never heard the name of Bernard Shaw. He is a drivelling preacher, and has no gifts but health and a narrow sense of duty. He is fond of coursing. One day I met a cousin of his and heard that 'his parents felt he had no special talents and were happy that he was safe in the Church'.

The Rev. E. F. is a gentleman, a keen Poor Law guardian, and a theological author who moves with astonishing certitude through the most dimly lit eras of early Church history. Once, in forcing a point in discussion with a lady in his parish who does not go to church, he said, 'Madam, I speak to you as a priest of God.' 'But,' was the answer, 'you are not a priest to me. You are my very welcome caller, and my friend. Won't you have another cup of tea?' 'I apologise abjectly,' said the Rev. E. F. He addresses his congregation with conviction and courage, but much of what he says they do not understand.

The Rev. G. H. is a poultry farmer with pupils. He has had squabbles with a churchwarden and with his choir, did not come agreeably out of a dispute about a workhouse chaplaincy, and told me that it was years since he had read a book. I have a note of his having said, 'If there is a good chair you will find it by the bedside.' So he is there sometimes.

The Rev. I. J. (whose predecessor was found out in covering up dilapidations at the vicarage on resigning his living) died last month. He was a man with some reputation as a tutor. He

played football with his pupils and the young men of the village, and was sincere. But as G. B. S. once wrote to a correspondent about the Rev. James Mavor Morell, 'the fact that he was sincere did not prevent him being a blithering idiot.' He was in hot water several times when he had Nonconformists to bury. When he came to the passage, 'We therefore commit his body to the ground . . . in sure and certain hope of the resurrection', he would omit 'sure and certain'. His sermons were almost unintelligible to his congregation because of something wrong with his throat. After his death it was discovered that he was the anonymous donor of £300 which set the ball rolling for the cottage hospital, and that this was most of the bachelor priest's savings.

The Rev. K. L. is a scholar. He is often abroad. He says he feels he needs a change. There is no week-day organization of any sort in his hamlet, and never a lecture. He it was who assured a stranger that 'nothing whatever is needed in this parish'. Some years ago he was in court over a trumpery stock exchange transaction. I forget the rights of it.

The Rev. M. N. is a genial and generous old hunting man in a family living. He said to me, 'I do appreciate a long day's shoot.' His sermon lasts seven minutes, and is often more than half cribbed. In the prayer for the Sovereign he occasionally muddles up George, Edward and Victoria. He does not lift his hat to the farmers' wives, but he was sorry about the way in which the Rev. G. H. made difficulties over the funeral service of a servant-girl who had been 'a bit free'.

The Rev. O. P., a sincere, unselfish, friendly fellow, but no preacher, has lately been sent to a lunatic asylum.

The Rev. R. S. is a dear and dutiful old man, who has set going a women's institute and a men's club. He is evangelical and the winner of a medal for begonias. He is inclined to think that the English may be one of the Lost Tribes.

'Father' T. U., who was a Baptist until he was twenty-seven, and has nine children, is so 'high' as to have been reprimanded by the bishop. He is an assiduous priest, but is in trouble with his

people, who, when they hear such invocations as 'that through the prayers of His Mother, the Virgin Mary, we may attain to the joys of everlasting life', remember that they are Protestants.

The Rev. V. W. (whose predecessor used to get drunk) is a bachelor less closely acquainted with soap and water than he might be. He has conducted a service with both his bootlaces and his cassock-cord trailing. He reads little of anything, and is a keen follower of the otter hounds. His sermons, apart from his stutter, are deplorable. He was a reader of Bottomley's *John Bull*, and distributes a leaflet on the need for confession.

The Rev. X. Y. Z.—and here I may stop—is Police Constable Gurry's friend. This parson owns that he does not think he should have entered the Church, but, being in it, is determined to make his own bit of it 'worth something'. He writes unpleasantly telling letters about the poor to his county paper, asks the right questions at the wrong meetings, and is seen at the allotments in his braces. His latest notion is to fit up wireless in his church, with the object of giving his people the occasional benefit of other preaching and talking than his own, which is a real act of self-discipline.

Only two or three of these twelve parsons have their churches more than a tenth full at any service. Several frequently address less than a dozen people, including their wives and their vergers.

When Farmer-churchwarden Richardson, of whom I have written, attended a ruridecanal meeting and, as he went in, beheld the assembled parsons of the district, he was heard to mutter, 'What a rummy lot of rooks!' Five of the parsons in my list would be remarked in any company as 'odd'.

How these five and their seven brethren who make up the twelve are to be accounted for, and how our countryside stands in relation to them all, we may get some way towards finding out later on in this book.

MORE ABOUT THEM

The most important question that we can ask of any teacher, as of the walk and conversation of any commonest person, remains this—how far has he stirred in men and women the deeper and more active sense of the worth and obligation and innumerable possibilities of life, how heightened self-respect?—*John Morley*

‘SPIRES’, wrote Gilbert White, ‘are very necessary ingredients in an elegant landscape.’ But of the parsons below the spires?

Twelve are as I have uncompromisingly reported.

Not without hope, thirty miles away, I asked a churchwoman how it might be in her district. Startling me by her vehemence she cried, ‘The clergymen are nearly all the same; they’re impossible!’

Following Montaigne, let us soften the temerity of the proposition. Let us assume that twelve parsons of a third area include a larger number of adequate men. But the average of the whole twenty-four? It is fair to strike such an average, and to ask where agriculture would be if our village blacksmiths did not reach a higher average level of efficiency in their shoeing and machinery repairing.

I have spoken with two county council officials. They are continually travelling about, and are keen in their departments of the work of social amelioration. One said: ‘There are four hundred parsons in the villages of this county; I do not believe that more than a hundred are really up to their job.’ The verdict of the other man was, ‘Many below any reasonable standard, incapable, or don’t trouble.’

Loudly to lament this state of things is as practical as to despair because water does not flow uphill. ‘Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be.’

be: why, then, should we choose to be deceived? ' It is, after all, episcopal advice.

Use less gumption; show, by all appearances, a lower sense of responsibility in choosing men for the Ministry than the Metropolitan Police exhibits in looking into the fitness of its recruits or of the men who are to drive taxis; and the upshot can be in no doubt.

Everybody knows that many parsons are, like many taxi-drivers, good fellows. But Scotland Yard would be bewildered by the notion of giving a man leave to serve the community as a taxi-driver because he was a good fellow.

The prospect of saving the Church in rural England by means of a sprinkling of good fellows is not hopeful.

Have bishops, in choosing parsons, as wide a range of choice as the police have in passing taxi-drivers? If they have not, why not?

The fact about the Church in not a few villages is that, to all intents and purposes, it is *dead* and that in many more villages it is *dying*.

The two reasons for this state of things need no searching out.

The first reason is that many of the parsons lack ability, character or spiritual experience.

The second reason is that much less of what is read, sung and said in the churches is now believed.

To go on pretending, because of a lack of a courage to face facts, that it is believed can have but one result.

Could doctors, editors or ironmongers, in their lines of life, successfully appeal to the public with such blindness to actualities as the Church displays in its choice of men, in its indifference to generally accepted truth, and in the inadequacy of the services rendered?

In many of our villages the church plays a no more impressive part than many a Buddhist temple in a Far Eastern village. The village temple serves an accustomed purpose for a rite at birth, marriage, and death, and, by custom, it is attended from time to time. For the rest, there is the personal matter of the mercy of

Buddha in life and eternity, and with this private matter the personality and actions of the priest have little to do.¹

A rural parson of gifts, who, at a diocesan conference, was troubled by the plea of a speaker—the late Dr. Warre of Eton, I think—for the entrance of gentlemen into the Church, flung at the tranquil assemblage the hard saying that ‘what the Church needs is not gentlemen, but bounders like Peter and Paul!’

There seems to be, as many Churchmen agree, only one chance of getting them—by disestablishment and disendowment. As no political leader, with power in his hands, ever talks nowadays of disestablishment or disendowment, our present race of rural rectors and vicars is evidently to survive and propagate itself for the puzzlement of posterity.

The country clergy have from their labourer parishioners the hat-touching of rural social usage. But the secret indifference is often not a little contemptuous. The rural worker does not show as much outward deference to his grocer as he does to his parson, but he may regard the grocer as the more straightforward man.

The farm worker, in his own person or that of his forbears, has been bested by his ‘betters’. What respect can he have for a clergy who have not seen him righted in the world as it is, and, though set apart for the work, make so little intelligent exertion to help him towards a better?

The blunt fireside judgment of the mass of agricultural labouring families on many a parson is that he is witless and lazy, a self-satisfied drone, who, by the advantage of his social position, has secured a soft job, to which he hangs on, although he knows, or ought to know, that much of what he keeps on saying about the gravest matters that can engross the human mind is untrue, or at any rate less true than the statements the schoolmistress puts before the children as true.

When one realises that the clergy are the only people in the country paid to tell the truth; when one knows how far most of them have fallen short of telling it; when one finds how little their

¹ ‘The Mercy of Buddha’ is the title of the first chapter in my *Foundations of Japan*.

dereliction of duty has come home to most of them; when one sees how persistently some of them stand in the way of other people's efforts to do part of the work they have left undone, it seems a marvel that Service men, back from the searching experience of the war, did not run a few of the more patently offending parsons out of their villages—until one remembers that the churches, however ill-parsoned, meet, in some degree, a human need.

The dwellers in overcrowded cottages, which always seem more overcrowded on Sundays, have 'nowhere else to go'.

It is a change for them to put on their Sunday clothes. And the church, the oldest and finest building in the village, has associations of dignity, other-worldliness, family sentiment and religious feeling, which, long after 'the Reverend' has abdicated or played with his functions, bring into the church struggling, aspiring men and women and young people, who, by reason of their poor education and circumstances, possess no moral or intellectual resource in books.

Then some people go to church because it is 'the thing'.

Or because it is the only non-material activity in the hamlet.

I have gone myself sometimes because, far from the truth though the teaching given at the church may be in my opinion, there is some gain in members of a community gathering together in a building which is more beautiful than their own homes, and is hallowed by the aspirations and memories of generations of local folk, and, while within the ancient building, confessing on their knees some of their shortcomings, and getting, from a sentence of the New Testament, or of Isaiah, a glimmering of life which is not all toil for food and shelter.

There is something to be got, too, by musically starved people from the organ and the singing, although the words of some of the hymns are as they are.

The incumbent may be slack of body and mind, but the people have become used to him, as they have become used to the cold of the dark winter mornings and to the damp of their cottages in time of rain.

The hour at church, away from home, the road, the field, the cattle and the pigs, and the effort which is made to attend and to get the best out of the service may be ordinarily a refreshment and a stimulus, sometimes an anodyne, and always, as I have said, a change.

It is rare that a parson is actively bad. Many are unquestionably good. Many at least make anxious efforts to do their duty as they see it. Few parsons can be without their moments of suffering, contrition, aspiration and struggle. Most of the clergymen who were very ordinary persons when they came into the wilds and have degenerated since are, like many of the priests of other countries, ignorant and stupid. But even out of stupidity may come at times a ray of earnestness to redeem it. On this blink of light in darkness charitably minded villagers stay their loyalty to the only Church and higher life they know.

Happily, when I have gone to church myself, I have avoided reading 'Lessons' taken from the darkest experiences of mankind. I have not sung feeble and futile hymns. I have not assented to a service so much of which is centuries behind experience, knowledge and human feeling, or to a slipshod homily almost mediæval in information and outlook.

But, as I have sat or stood or knelt through it all, as I have heard of 'the humble poor', of a conception of society which is not only false but dangerous, of Charles the Martyr, or miracles which never happened, of saints of more than doubtful authenticity, of the need for confession, of things that make me wonder whether I am in a Protestant or a Roman Catholic church, and of how the church, with, through the parson's and the Church's own incapacity, only five or six weary people in it—including two from the vicarage and myself—is not 'empty but filled with angels', I have asked myself if I have been dealing quite fairly with neighbours who know nothing of my mental reservations and little of the thoughts on which I build my hopes for the future.

WHY THE SCHOOL SUCCEEDS AND THE CHURCH MISSES ITS CHANCES

When I wrote recently on what is to me by far the most important and interesting thing in life—namely, religion, I was peremptorily ordered to leave religion to the divines. If I had written on politics I would not have been told to leave politics to professional politicians.—*Sir Francis Younghusband*

IN hamlets I know best, the standard-bearers of progress, civilization, evolution, well-doing, the higher life, better living, true religion—call it what you like—have been, without doubt, teachers at the schools.

As these citizens (two women and one man) are the chiefs of Church schools, the Church may take the share of credit to which it is entitled. That share of credit is such as may be derived from the fact that the schools were built by adherents of the Church, and that the responsibility for the maintenance of the fabric of the schools rests on school managers who are members of the Church of England. (The school managers consist of four foundation members who must be Churchmen, and two members, appointed one by the county council and the other by the parish council or parish meeting, who are usually Churchmen.)

On the other hand, the whole cost of the salaries of the teaching staffs, of books and stationery, of firing, of lighting and cleaning, is discharged by the ratepayers and taxpayers.

Further, the cost of the maintenance of the fabric does not ordinarily exceed a pound or so a year (usually made up by contributions solicited from non-Church as well as Church people).

Beyond this, the Church has the great advantage of choosing the teachers and of sending its clergymen into the schools and of imposing on the children the Church's teaching. (There is the

conscience clause permitting of the withdrawal of children during religious instruction, but the existence of the clause is unknown to most country people, and it is rare in a hamlet to find children withdrawn or, as is legal, non-Church teaching demanded.)

As the Church is quite unable, in any hamlet with which I happen to be acquainted, to meet the expense of running its school—that is to say, its school would be closed to-morrow were the grants from public funds to be withdrawn—some people will think that the Church has a greater advantage than, in the public interest, it deserves to be allowed to retain.

‘Twenty-eight per cent. of the children in elementary schools are in Church of England schools,’ the Archbishop of Wales stated on June 20, 1924, ‘but not more than one-half of the children in Church schools are the children of Church parents.’ And ‘Church parents’ is, of course, a loose phrase.

One of the objections to the present system is that, as Church people are usually alone eligible to be school managers (apart from the county council representative and the parish council or parish meeting representative), these managers do not necessarily include the residents in a rural parish who are likely to be most interested in education.

The reason why the moral leadership of the hamlets of which I am writing has passed from the clergy to the school teachers is plain.

The teachers had an effectual calling to their work.

Teachers are ordinarily teachers because they have qualifications for teaching, because they have had training in teaching, because they delight in teaching, and because they dutifully, joyfully make the sacrifices of physical strength and comfort and of a broken spirit that the true teacher must so often make.

Further, they are fond of, they love their children. They yearn over them. They earnestly desire their good. They speak to them of things beyond schoolbooks. They have faith in them. They are their champions during and after their school life. Their scholars are their whole thought.

Yes, that is not too much to say.

The witness of these teachers' success is, first, the regard which the children show them.

In the second place, there is the large measure of the hamlet's confidence which the teachers hold. They hold this confidence because they teach things that are believed to be true, and because they habitually do the work they have engaged to do and a bit over.

The two schoolmistresses and the schoolmaster of whom I write have had neither as good a technical education as, nor all the opportunities of education in a wider sense that, they ought to have had. And they have been starved for friendship with educated people.

But they have commonly done their best with their talents and with the machinery of education they have had to direct. They work and live up to their lights. They make efforts after self-improvement. They have a devotion to their calling. They have industry, character, disinterestedness, goodness. Outside school hours they are usually foremost in lending a hand in any ameliorative effort their hamlet is making.

Some parsons and their apologists, in extenuation of the shortcomings of the rural clergy, plead the isolation of the country clerical life. Think of the social isolation of these school-teachers, and of the considerable weight of indifference with which they struggle!

Until in one hamlet a lead was given by a new local resident, the two schoolmistresses had never been to tea at a school manager's. One of them had never been to tea at the vicarage.

Neither of them had ever had the parsonic broad brim lifted to her.

How can it be hoped that a clergyman who does not think the schoolmistress worthy of the courtesy ordinarily shown to a woman, and does not value her confidences at his fireside, will be able to reach the hearts of farm workers?

That the three head teachers I have in mind, superior in general information and moral leadership to their parsons and most of their school managers, have resources, in their reading and interests,

which weigh against social privation, cannot blind us to the unconscious heroism of their lives and to what their hamlets owe them.

Some apologists for the Church in the rural districts plead the difficulty of getting recruits for the ministry. But the good work of the school teachers in and out of the schools shows that many men and women of intelligence, character and goodness are available for the service of the rural districts.

If incomes not so dissimilar from those paid to teachers, and opportunities wider than are open to them, fail to attract to the Church a sufficiency of men of intelligence, character and goodness; if the Church can obtain good school-teachers for the very parishes in which it is unhappily represented by its parsons, can there be more than one explanation?

Is it not that there is something in the present formularies, teaching, pretensions and manning of the Church which hinders suitable recruits from taking its yoke upon them?

In many of our villages the Church, which was in the field long before the School, has been distanced by the School, and this fact has not sunk into the minds of the clergy and their apologists.

It is a sad thing to have to set down in print the record of parsonic shortcoming which, after consideration, I have felt it a duty to publish. It was a sadder thing to see the way in which the record was received when it was originally printed in the *Nation*.

Not one out of the dozen or more clerics who wrote in criticism of these Chapters, as they appeared serially, seemed much troubled by what has gone so badly wrong with the Church in a large part of rural England. In the letters which reached me there was little more than professional resentment, amazing insensitiveness to the gravity of the specified offences—'in the country we see our failures'—a readiness to minimise them and hide them, an arrogant cry of 'free-thinker' and 'dissenter', a pitiful invitation to controversy—give your name and address and the like—controversy that Churches die of, that no one desirous of facing reality has belief in or time for.

The plain statement I have made is a statement that thousands of

men and women outside rectories and vicarages know to be true. My correspondents did not sadly admit it to be true. They called it persecution, abuse and malignancy, the words Churches have always used when called to account.

Do such clerics as I have pictured exist, or do they not exist? If they exist—and every impartial student of the countryside knows that they exist—what conceivable gain could come from pillorying the poor fellows, as some clerical correspondents requested, by naming their neighbourhoods? It is not the imperfect parsons, but the system which made and goes on making them which is at fault.

Attention had to be drawn to them because they are public servants. (They call themselves servants of God.) Whole parishes are in their care or under some measure of their influence. If, in the things that matter most, the countryside is to have its just opportunity 'in health long to live', it is necessary to speak with plainness of blind mouths.

There is no need to repeat the fact that there are also, as I know full well, worthy rural parsons.

Readers who do not know of them will assume their existence, for it is common sense that if the Church did not number among its representatives many conscientious, spiritually minded and socially minded men, the Church would be quite dead.

Nor is it necessary to say that the offending parsons are not the only people in the villages who fail to do their duty. How many of us are doing our duty? How many of us realize what our duty is?

What is wrong with the Church is that the clergyman is so often attempting to maintain a position which in our day is beyond an ordinary man's power.

He is to hold for life a post for which he may become unfit.

In public he is to speak, but he is never to be contradicted.

In his home he reads only the writings of those who are careful not to offend him or seldom give him a thought.

At a time when few look to him any longer as the seat of authority or as a fountain of particular merit, he is perched—if I

may thoroughly mix my metaphors—on the social structure in a fashion that is a hindrance at once to robust self-knowledge and to the manifestation of that natural love and neighbourliness which are the basis of all effective ministration.

Inside his church he keeps on reading and repeating to a congregation, whose minds are far away, history and doctrines on evidence that he would not credit in engaging a gardener or in buying a pony. He goes on making assertions for statements of fact, he sentimentalizes, he cribs, and he milk-and-waters; he would not do it in talk in a railway carriage. At a public meeting, at which he is liable to be questioned or contradicted, his tongue is noticeably more guarded.

The plea made by apologists for a large class of rural clergy is that they are poor, and that their education has been insufficient. But it is not more money or education in the ordinary sense that the rural parson so often lacks.

A man may be brotherly, neighbourly, an inspiring influence on a community's life, and believe that the sun goes round the earth. Many country parsons lack books and the habit of reading, but every one of the things that are necessary to clerical salvation is in their New Testaments.

And there is nothing in the New Testament's conception of a preacher of the Gospel that calls for his being better paid than schoolmasters.

A curate of limited information, but of enough manful intelligence to boggle at the Thirty-nine Articles, once, while he was spiritually perplexed, stayed with me, and because his means were narrow, served pluckily as a gardener. I never knew him finish a book. But he was as good a Christian as he could be, and content to be poor; and the shrewdest and most shrewish old woman in the parish felt his love as he prayed with her and was persuaded that the Christian life was a reasonable thing.

It was after tentmaking, week in and week out, that Paul 'every Sabbath persuaded the Jews and the Greeks'.

There are still believers in this way of going to work.

I discovered that the alert, painstaking, decent ironmonger who

calls on us fortnightly for orders has 'preached the Gospel' in chapels throughout our district every Sunday for six years.

The honest thatcher, three hamlets away, who for his weekday work's sake is sought out by the architects of more than one county, is on the Wesleyan 'plan', and speaks movingly in drab, stuffy little Methodist chapels (built by impecunious people) not far from us. So does an industrious, honest-faced little builder in two hamlets beyond him.

In our own hamlet, though some of the labourers had a Non-conformist father or mother, there has never been a chapel. In past time, 'Squire and Reverend didn't hold with Dissent'.

'Squire were a queer un,' William Hampson told me; 'could be real good to those he favoured, but rare cruel to those he didn't think well o'. He made the music in the church. He put in his organ what tune he thought he would, and, as he turned the handle of his organ, the tassels on his Wellingtonians joggled. Rum times them was. Sarah Pudney's mother were one of a gang o' three wimmen of this place that used to fight any three furriner wimmen. She were put in the stocks once.'

The hamlet to the north of us has a Baptist chapel which 'has been shut years, and floor's rotted'.

Vesey, the odd Vesey of whom I wrote in Chapter 6—he says he has had 'no disciplinary education' and sees too many points of view to be a speaker—leaves his writing-pad, his pigs, and his gardening for the schoolroom of his village one Sunday a month—he gardens half the other Sundays—and talks or reads or gets his men and women visitors to talk or read to his neighbours, about all sorts of things, in a simple taking way that is liked. He introduces these talks with scraps of untheological Scripture, and, at the hardly-used school piano, plays and sings his best. What pleases him most is that, without any difficulty, he has got the people to sit in silence for two minutes 'to do something towards working out their own salvation'. His congregations are larger than those at the church.

Two Quakers of the district—Friends have never believed in a stated ministry—are among his helpers. Some of their own

meeting-places are closed with the shifting of the population. The un-Sundayish addresses of these merchant and doctor Friends come down to plain, bracing non-preachy talk on the inner light, and on neighbourliness in village and State.

This is the highwater mark of local Nonconformity. The ebb tide is marked by Dowellism—there are also ‘Peculiars’—and by the survival in some of the tiny isolated chapels (as in the Church) of British Israelitish obsessions and Salvationist blood-and-fire doctrine without, sometimes, Salvationist humour, enterprise and loving-heartedness.

The only regular Nonconformist minister for four miles round is a liberal-minded, active and humble man in whose path some of his people determinedly cast thorns. Less and less he leans on doctrine—he has the rare advantage of an open trust deed—and more and more on the humanity of a ‘brotherhood’ movement, in which war is made on pettiness, selfishness, pride, drink, sexuality, and the sheer ignorance at the basis of all our troubles.

When the wrecked sailors of the anecdote were lost to hope, and thought of ‘putting up a bit of a prayer’, but were without enough experience to do so, it is fabled that the apprentice remembered that at his chapel they always took a collection, and this rite was symbolically performed. There is this to be said for the little Dissenting tabernacles of our out-of-the-way countryside, that, unlovely though they may be in looks, and in some of the doctrines urged and sung in them, they are attended by people who believe enough in their religion to pay for it. Their collections per head are twice what is got at the churches, though the churches have better-off folk among their adherents.

The young men and women who go to these chapels attend partly, as the young people who go to the churches attend them, because they want to see fresh faces, especially faces of another sex, and because they have nothing else to do with themselves. Year by year, however, the cycle, the motor-cycle on the instalment plan, the Sunday papers, the wireless, and a little book reading out of the branches of the county library are making known a larger world.

The number of sitters in the pine pews of the chapels and the oak pews of the churches falls ever lower.

But instructed Churchmen can have only one feeling towards the weakling rural chapels. The chapels are, in the main, a reproach to the National Church. They stand about the rural districts as monuments to past clerical incapacity, clerical unwisdom and clerical selfishness, monuments to a Church which has so frequently hid its message in its self-importance.

To-day such shortcomings get beyond our patience.

LITTLE DEVIL DOUBT

In the rural districts it is the incredible which is true. I know that because I was myself a villager. People who have not been villagers can only be told. It is little wonder if they doubt. Much of the life of the village must be incredible to people of another experience of life, or those who, though they live in the country, are not villagers.—*A member of the Order of Merit*

IN some letters, ignoble letters, I received while I was trying my best to bring together, in my *Nation* articles, faithful pictures of hamlet life, there was an insistence, as I have said, that I should give my name and address. As if that would help!

Why, the truth about two farmers in hamlets I have in mind is that, virtuous husbands though they are, it might be for the hamlets' good if they went bankrupt. They are poor farmers and selfish employers, and, as they foregather most with farmers of their own kind and read nothing, and their parsons do little or nothing for them, no improvement in their ways is likely. Their cornland will remain choked with dock, thistle and couch. Their men will be the men other farmers do not want.

As for the cottagers, in such backward hamlets, the truth is that it will very soon be too late to save many of them for any valuable purpose for the countryside.

Were it not for the daily miracle of natural beauty, the blessing of sunshine, the healing quiet, the joy of outdoor labour, the thought of the level to which the life of rural people has been raised in other lands and in many parts of our own country, and the way in which the darkest day in the hamlet is irradiated, is charged with cheerfulness for such as me by some spark of goodness, some gleam of wit or common sense, or some glow of skill, life in the country, remote from so many of the encouragements and so much of the stimulus of London, would be too sad to be bearable.

At a parish meeting there was a gloomy aside, muttered rather than spoken, on the inconvenient distance to the then existing allotments—so far to go to utilize an hour in hoeing or to bring home the crops. The other day, when the unlikelihood of either of our farmers releasing a bit of land nearer the cottages was talked about, one of the men said: ‘Well, I don’t know that it be so worth while. I’m about past it, anyhow. So’s Joe there. Who else really minds? The young chaps don’t see working nights when the day’s work’s taken it out of them. A bit of land’s all right, a bit you can get to right away and use up your odd bits of time. But these allotments’s near like slavery, if you have as many chain as I’ve had. The young uns be right when they say a man should have earned his living when he knocks off work, not have to set to agin at the same sort of work when his feet’s nigh give out.’

I see the railway, the London police, and sometimes the emigration agent taking away some of the most promising young fellows. How is the work on the farms to be done by the less promising?

‘On the line’, an oldster said, ‘you can have a man’s life, and, with the wages, do yourself some good. As for Canada, when I thinks what my brother Ned made out for himself there, and Joe’s oldest lad, I wonder why spunky fellows stay here at all. If you stay in England and get into the Police, there’s the pension at the end. What’s the end of farm labouring? Rheumatism and being old ten or fifteen years afore your time. You’re gradually wore out; then they get giving you less wages. Later like, you live on, best way you can, on your old age pension and perhaps some club money, with your cottage wanted all the time by younger folk than you and your old wife. Or your wife’s gone afore you, and your daughter-in-law, small blame to her, covets for her children the room you take up. If your wife’s spared, all your family’s gone away. Then, if one of you gets infirmish, you get too old to wait on one another. What are you to do then? And you’ve worked hard all your life, both on you; and’—with the laugh with which the labourer seasons his serious speeches—‘minded reasonably what you could make out of what parson said.’

Oddams filled his pipe and went on: 'As all the cottages but three belongs to the farmers there's small chance of staying in them if you're not working for the men that has the renting of them. Same as if you've an accident, or get ill. The farmer'll want to find house room for a new man and his kids. You have to go. Where? Who wants a cripple, or a sick man with a family? Of course, you get compensation for the crippling if the farmer's insured for accidents. But suppose he's too mean, or thinks he's too clever to? You can't force him to do right by you. If you do, you lose your job and get yourself ill-looking at by the farmers round about when you're out o' work. What sort of a word will old "Hardfist" say for you after sacking you? A labourer with a young family's no free man. He's tied. No wonder he's civil to those he's to get his bread from. And now and again, perhaps, to get some of his own back, does them in a bit. Farmers can't have it both ways. But there, some farmers actually thinks they can treat a man bad and still get best out of him.'

'Of course,' the stockman resumed after he had taken a few paces from the gate and back again, 'some of the young uns coming on might be better than they are from the master's point of view. But, looking at what their fathers and mothers has gone through, is it likely these boys and gals look gladly to working on the land or in the farmhouse kitchen? They're minded to make out a better life of it somehow for themselves, if so be there's any grit in them at all. And they're not so easy put on now, with what the War learnt them and the better education they get and what they hear tell of in the papers and by people they meet chance times.'

But to the country resident concerned for his village there comes at times Little Devil Doubt.

The tempter whispers: 'Why worry about these people, why take their affairs so gravely? Time will deal faithfully with a labouring class which has not known how to hold its own, let its best blood go, as it will deal also with ineffective agriculture and an effete rural parsondom. Rural parsondom is better, at any rate, than it was fifty years ago. Capital, machinery, science and experience will take over the ill-farmed land. The mere wage-earners will go

under for good, or evolve into something else. Nature is always starting afresh'.

And the tempter has hardly gone when there comes word of some labourer's slyness—'If you are not strong,' says the Boer proverb, 'you must "be *slim*"'—or of another worker's unconscientiousness or laziness or foulness.

And some of the servant-girls from the cottages, who are getting better wages than they are worth, are found to be irresponsible, unskilled, and, beyond a point, unteachable. In their better-offness, their finer clothes, and their refuge in a novelette, they are graceless.

Is, then, the human material of some of the cottages worth any great effort of reclamation? The people seem to have lost something of their spirit, grit, and *nous*. How much did they ever have?

It is vain, perhaps, to expect from them the response that it seems possible to get in the better instructed, more independent, more resistant North.

Are they too far gone? The best men and women have been driven away. These are the progeny of the third and fourth rate to the third and fourth generation.

But the next day, as the splendid morning breaks, comes the thought that, *far gone though some of the labouring class may be, they are not farther gone than some of the people at the farms, in the parsonages and at the big houses.*

These people, who are not cottagers, have had, and still have, many advantages that the cottagers have neither enjoyed nor known.

These better-offs also have the public ear. When they imagine themselves ill-used they raise loud cries, and they are heard for their much speaking.

They may suffer at times, but their extremity is not the extremity of the labourers' families in leaky, overcrowded, insanitary makeshifts for homes, destructive of self-respect and the will to improvement, conducive to a readiness to take from all who have the mood of giving.

The marvel is not that so many of these labouring folk are so far

behind, but that, after all they and theirs have gone through, they are not at a lower stage of intelligence, character and physique. The more one thinks about it and the more one sees and knows and feels, the more wonderful seems the goodness that has persisted.

In considering the countryside it must never be forgotten that it is not only the cottages on which darkness has descended.

Our social system has worked its will in the farmhouses, the parsonages, and the mansions. The people in them are what we have allowed them to become. They are the fruits of the degree of enlightenment to which we have attained.

'O marvellous justice of God,' cried the great Leonardo, 'which allows no cause from failing to produce all its effects!'

If it is not hidden from us, if we know very well indeed, what the causes are that have brought so much of our countryside, the reservoir of our race's physical, mental and moral health, to the pass at which we find it to-day, we also know what results have followed in other places and in other countries from certain other causes.

We therefore strive.

We patiently, continually strive for a better day, as others have striven, successfully.

Our faith is that, in time, a way will be made by the swords which are not sheathed, by the mental strife which does not cease while Jerusalem is a-building.

STEVE AND WILL

‘I will endeavour to write plain English.’—*Wilkes*

ON Sunday night I had by my fireside for half an hour the best-looking, the most intelligent and, perhaps, the most unselfish of the young men in our hamlet. On Monday morning, after I had countersigned the last of his blue papers, he went up to London to his quarters in Peel House, a recruit for the Metropolitan Police.

Not long ago his elder brother, an equally promising young fellow, did the same thing.

It is not to be expected that you should feel, as we of the hamlet feel, the importance of such local events. What they amount to is this. If an enlightened and energetic farmer bought a farm here, and wanted first-class labour, *he could not get it.*

Now that Steve and Will are gone, we have only three men left who are not ‘past it’ or in body or brain below the standard of efficient farm-workers.

This is very much the state of things which what some people are content with as civilization has brought about in many parts of the countryside.

It is certain that neither Steve nor Will wanted to leave the land. Three-quarters of their day-by-day talk was about the land, and the last time Steve got a half-day off (by working late several days) it was to go to a stock sale.

But what was the land doing for Steve and Will? The land did not seem to feel the same need as the Police for serviceable workers. The Police undertakes to pay Steve and Will £3 10s. a week instead of the 25s. they have had, and, before they are fifty, a pension of three-fourths of what they are then earning, and they both have the makings of sergeants.

It is true that our county has put up its minimum wage to 30s. (less rent). But 30s. compared with 70s.—and London!

Although, however, good pay and all it commands in later life have a great deal to do with Steve and Will leaving us, another influence has been at work. There is something which the two young men have tried to describe when they talked, as Oddams did, of the chance of an interesting life, of getting on, of doing oneself some good, of rising, of having a decent man's life.

'Coming back at fifty, Steve?' I asked. 'Sure, sir,' he answered. 'By that time,' I said, 'there will be the certainty of a nice cottage and a bit of land.' 'That for me, sir,' he answered.

But I am not so sure. We shall see what sort of a girl gets Steve. Ten to one, London has him for good.

The father of Steve and Will is our best horseman, and is fond of horses. Hear him talk after the fair (six miles off) of the fortunes of a horse he has led there to be sold.

But his feet do not serve him as well as they did, and he is scantier of breath. He is often dog-tired when his day closes in. Before daylight, for a part of the year, he is cracking his whip at the meadow gate to call his horses so that they may get their feed before they go to work. He knocks off after dark, and he always has Sunday work.

But it is not so much the hours he complains of, 'though they be too long, as never having no break unless I'm queer-like and have to lay up.' And, 'What's there to look forward to now I'm getting on?'

When Horseman Oddams thinks not only of the opportunities that his sons, Steve and Will, have of bettering themselves and of laying something by, it is little wonder that there is bitterness in his voice.

His pay, after a long, hard apprenticeship and a lifetime's experience, is not, at nearer seventy than sixty, half what his lads are beginning on. As he has had a large family he has saved hardly anything. His back is bent, his brow is furrowed, his chest is asthmatic, his feet drag. His cottage roof has been leaking for months.

And when he gives up, because he is no longer able to do his work and because his old age pension is due and his wife's not far off, he

will have to leave the hamlet, for his master will want his cottage, and there is no other cottage to be had here.

Where he will go I cannot imagine, for the surrounding hamlets are equally shelterless. Possibly to London, to be near his sons, and lead the piteous life of the uprooted old countryman in a grimy back street or on the third floor of some model dwellings.

If you had sat beside his master, Farmer Looker, as I did at a meeting not so long ago, and heard him stamp approval on the floor when a speaker was talking of farmers' concern for their men, of how farmers wished them to remain on the land, and of how they desired to be able to pay a living wage, you would have thought that sound socio-economic notions were spreading marvellously in the Shires. But it was the same farmer who was last year paying 21s. a week to a man with three children. He did it, he explained, in the public interest, or, as he put it, 'to stop this 'ere profiteerin'; if the men hasn't the money the tradesmen won't be able to charge as they does'. What could be more patriotic?

The wife of this farmer has working for her for an hour every morning the wife of the 21s. a week labourer, and gives her sixpence and no breakfast. Is the woman to refuse and perhaps 'get my man wrong' with the master and bring on her another move, with three children and another coming?

The farmer's wife 'makes out' with this daybreak help and a washing day—not weekly but monthly, 'so that the woman will have enough to fill her day.' The washerwoman, for whom no wringer or mangle is provided, has to include some kitchen floor scrubbing and other jobs in her eighteenpenny washing day.

Formerly this thoughtful mistress had the seventeen-year-old daughter of the cowman to her house. The girl arrived at seven in the morning, being then supposed to have had her breakfast. But she did get her dinner, sometimes less than a big growing girl could eat. She went home after washing up the dinner things, came back to lay tea, but not to tea, and returned home to a grossly overcrowded cottage to sleep, although there are several unused bedrooms in the childless farmhouse. When this maid asked her mistress for 'a little more a week as I'm now a year

older'm,' the mistress answered, ' But see how much time I give you at home.'

The farmer as a good husband, if not a good husbandman, keeps his wife in countenance. He was standing at the farmyard gate chatting with a stranger when the poorly paid cowman passed. The man had a leveret, caught in the reaper. ' Got a hare there?' said the master. ' Yes, sir,' said the cowman. ' Ah!' said the master, reaching out his hand for it. When the cowman walked on, the farmer said to the man he was talking with, ' Funny thing, my cowman don't like hares.'

The cowman did not give up the hare with a grin, however, but with a dark look. Is it possible that his neighbour who gave him a change of potato seed does not share his repugnance to hares?

As the farmer is churchwarden and his wife a school-manager you will understand how perfectly the wheels of progress are oiled in the hamlet.

At least two labourers and their wives are more intelligent than Farmer Looker and Farmer Horridge and their spouses, and do more for their self-improvement. The thinking people in many hamlets are to be found in cottages.

The farmers and their wives are in no doubt, however, that they themselves are in every way superior to the cottagers. If they were told that there is no Scriptural warrant for the established order of landowners, farmers, and 'labouring poor,' they would say it was English ways anyhow and common sense. These farmers and their wives—there are happily others—feel no responsibility or very little for the narrow, shrunken lives of the people who work for them, for their damp, sagging, overcrowded, frowsty, germ-laden dwellings, and for the poor reward in old age. They do not think about such things, at least not for long.

Two farmers in a hamlet I was in have recently joined the trade union of their calling. They have done it for the advantages it gives them. They take an agricultural paper—for the prices. They put something in the plate at church, for is it not written over the door that it is ' the gate of Heaven '? But this is all the

interest they show in the world beyond their own homes and relations, unless it was displayed in the putting up of a Conservative poster at the General Election. It is true that the poster was brought to their doors, and was to get them a pound an acre. But the party agent knows better than to ask them to waste petrol and time on taking voters to the poll.

It is not much to the point to say, what is true, that these farmers, and their wives, are not a fair sample of the agricultural world.

What is to the point is that such farmers and their wives exist; that, while they and others like them exist, some of our agriculture will go on discrediting us, and some of our forlorn hamlets will be emptied of the able-bodied; that if there is to be a Last Day these farmers and the lay and clerical persons in authority over them will be brought to judgment for Steve and Will leaving us, for the downcast lives of the father and mother of Steve and Will, for the ne'er-do-well-dom of Harry Simpson (cousin of Steve and Will), whom no one looked after when he left school orphaned, and for all the misery of his sister Mary, who, having spirit but no guidance, first adventured with a baby and then went on the streets of the cathedral city not so many miles from us.

PS.—Since I wrote I hear that *three* young labourers in a hamlet near are going together into the Police.

THE POWER IN THE AIR

There's a great deal to be said about this.—*Wellington*

WHATEVER pains I take, however I may rewrite—and after a lifetime of writing I have to own humbly that every one of these chapters has been rewritten—the difficulty of being quite fair, quite clear, and quite convincing is always present to me.

The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—or as near the truth as my experience enables me to make it—can be commanded by the ancient method only. It must be 'line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little, with stammering lips'.

What I never cease to marvel at is the satisfied certainty with which not only people—shall I say?—of the week-ending classes, but variously shaded, well-intentioned, and in their way attentive politicians, and students of rural conditions as well, express themselves with regard to country life and village people.

How are these energetic, confident well-wishers of the rural population to be persuaded that it is possible to be close to facts and pass them by, to be within sight of facts and fail to grasp them?

After living in hamlets I am baffled and perplexed, even, at times, distressed and humiliated, in my efforts to seize upon its psychology, and hardly know just what to say positively about our future and how we can best be aided. How shall the stranger understand, or prepare himself or herself to understand?

What is the one thing that looks true about our conditions here? It is that they persist. Here are, apparently, endurance, conservatism, resistance, dullness, quiescence, acquiescence, choose the word you will. Here are unaltered, undeviating, confirmed, rooted, inveterate, insusceptible, stuck-fast things.

Yet, in reality, all is changing, and changing very quickly.

I have tried to give you a sight of us with our shamed back-

ground, the noble architecture of the church; with our farm buildings, which are a tinkered makeshift; our cottages, which are a sorrow to gaze on; our huddle of men and women, who are the spiritless, shrunk leavings of the railway and police services and of the adventurous spirit.

I write our hamlet, but it is not on the map. I cannot take you to it. It is one of many hamlets.

I had staying with me a man whose name is known all over England for a countryman who has worked hard at rural problems. He said he had been 'depressed' by what he saw in a certain hamlet.

To-day that hamlet has three wireless sets in it. In the next hamlet, which is larger, there are nine.

The wireless sets are in cottages alongside other cottages in which old men and women are a little afraid to gossip 'lest they boys' wireless next door do 'ear what we do say', and a crone has complained sourly that her cold is due to her neighbour's habit of keeping her window open!

Some light may be thrown for you on the home life into which resurgent Nature has brought wireless, by the fact that, when asked by the schoolmistress to say what struck them most about a casual visitor to her school, several children cried out together, 'He's so clean!'

It is not only the wireless—the man who brings round the oil reckons to spend twenty pounds on his—which is bringing new conceptions to the hamlet. A motor-bus, which connects with the motor-bus to the county town, has begun to come a little out of its way in order to give us the chance of joining it at the cross-roads.

It is the young fellows, of course, who are putting in crystal sets and aspiring to two valves. The middle-aged seem to remain as they were, but almost unconsciously make a certain progress in order to keep themselves in countenance before a younger generation which threatens their self-respect. So a spirit, the Time Spirit, is moving on the waters that seemed so stagnant.

The Time Spirit lately appeared in the unheard-of guise of an

upholstery class. The class was started after prudent preparation. It actually drew out of seeming stagnation as many students as the teacher, with an experience in other counties, had ever had before!

There followed first aid. Sixteen or seventeen young fellows attended weekly, and beyond this, on their own account, gathered one night a week for additional practice. (The numbers fell off a little later.)

Who ran the class? Two railway porters from the Junction.

What were these porters before they went to the station? Farm labourers.

Who brought in the wireless?

Two young fellows, one of whom lives in a cottage rather in a class by itself. They 'read a bit' there.

The other lad was the parson's son. For a few years past this boy had gone on his bicycle to a secondary school four miles off.

The other wirelesses have been set up by imitative fellows of about the same age and by three young married men, equally bent on entertaining themselves.

So you can see that this little advance against sloth, intellectual poverty, conservatism, and the public-house came simply by education, and, like the success of the upholstery and first-aid teaching, by making an avenue for wits which had had no chance of congenial development. Some people would have denied that the wits were there. But they were there, only they had never had a chance.

A lady once wrote to me that she had tried lending books in her village, but they were very little borrowed. 'We have tried to do something for this village,' she said, 'but it was a failure, so we have ceased our efforts.' But surely reading is an art. The uncultivated always feel that they have no concern with books or that books are knowledge at secondhand. Young men, unaccustomed to sitting still indoors after an active day in the open, and lacking the light, quiet, and general convenience for and inducement to reading that you and I enjoy, are unready for a recreation which does not mean doing something with their hands or feet.

Two village libraries I have heard of were stopped because the younger lads who came to them on wet evenings—when there was nowhere else for them to go—began to shy the books at one another, and even brought in a football. What was more likely?

A large proportion of young men and young women are ready for culture by making and doing, not by way of the printed page. What is wrong about that?

As a matter of fact, two score first-aid and wireless primers have been procured. The hamlets are getting round to reading when it is found to be worth while.

And such books as have been bought, you will notice, are not novels.

The other night one hamlet got a shock. It had the opportunity of hearing a speech by a young fellow, with worker's hands and worker's tones, who had studied at a working-men's college. He was still, in a large measure, happily, the country workman. But he could say what he feels and the people of the hamlets feel. He had read and heard things of which the hamlets had heard little, had met people they had not had the chance of meeting, and he was not spoilt in the very least but bettered by what he had experienced.

He spoke honestly, even wittily, of debts as well as rights, of ideas as well as things, and of a personal relationship to the unseen and eternal which had shaped and was shaping his life. He spoke in a moving way in simple phrases from his heart.

The young and middle-aged men and women who listened to him had never or seldom heard the like. If this was religion, then something that had been spoken of as religion, something that did after all seem a bit ineffectual and far-fetched and a little out of date when you come to think of it, was certainly not religion.

And the little audience not only listened attentively and applauded, and grinned in a friendly way at the home thrusts, but gave to the collection twice as much as it gives at church, when it goes there, for more and more stay away most Sundays.

The leadership of the hamlet, which had passed from the hands of the parson, is now clearly seen to be in the hands of daily and weekly paper editors and broadcasters, the schoolteachers,

the students of wireless and first-aid, the chance speaker, and the railway porters at the Junction, who have come once a week, rain or shine, three miles for nothing.

No, not for nothing. I imagine they have some notion, not of 'doing good', but of being of service. Where did they get the notion? Is it fire from the belly of trade unionism or of politics? Or is it born of that essence of Christianity which long since entered into our common life, with so much less help from the Church than it might have had?

However that may be, I find myself wondering why these two missionaries of health—'cleanness of body', as Bacon says, 'was ever deemed to proceed from a due reverence to God'—and the young man with his stirring experience should not have had a chance to talk in the worthiest and most impressive surroundings, in association with the only piece of beautiful architecture left, in a building the history of which and the relationship of which stir villagers more deeply than anything they have.

In the church—the average congregation has been these last two years just nine—there is a small lady chapel which is never used. Why should the descendants of the people who helped to build this chapel be denied its use for worthy purposes?

But this is stating a problem which the hamlet cannot solve by itself. Is the solution much farther away, however, than hearing familiarly, at poor cottage firesides, the voices of the King, the Prime Minister, the music of Paderewski and Tetrizzini and concerts in Paris, would have seemed five years ago?

Five years hence, the experts say, many of us, instead of motor-ing, will be flying. Everything in England is to move forward except the Church as by law established.

THE PARISH MEETING

The concern of every man with the place in which he lives has to do with something more than the amount of rates and taxes he has to pay.—*Thomas Smith*

THE Londoner lives neighbourless. His acquaintance with representative institutions is mainly theoretical. At the polling station he sees knots of his fellow-electors, but he does not know a man or woman of them. If he goes into the gallery of the council of his borough every face is strange.

As we sit on the forms in the schoolroom of our hamlet, on a spring evening, at the annual parish meeting, we all know one another, and know one another pretty thoroughly. There is nothing official about the smoky lamp, the parson at the school-teacher's desk, and the farmers in the first row with pipes in their mouths. Three of us, two forms behind, make up the gathering. No theorizing about representative institutions here. This is the representative institution, and one of those who is known very well indeed is the present district councillor and poor-law guardian—the two offices are combined.

The gathering is really more important than I have made out. It is not only the parish meeting—a parish has to number two hundred inhabitants in order to have a parish council—but the annual parochial church council and the school-managers' meeting; and nobody seems quite clear just where each of these assemblies begins and leaves off, and just what is the measure of authority which each possesses.

The last parish meeting was held on April 20, whereas the law says that it should be held between March 1 and April 1. Nobody noticed. The parson-chairman forgot to get himself re-elected. Nobody noticed.

The chairman before the parson's time used to be the oldest

farmer. The gathering came together in this wise. On the night on which it was to be held the farmer went with his son to old George's and old Henry's cottages, and got old George and old Henry to put on their boots again and come with them.

Arrived at the schoolroom, the farmer would say, 'Now we want a chairman.' 'Do 'ee be chairman, Jarge?' said Henry. 'Not me,' said Henry. 'Well,' said the farmer, 'I've usually been chairman.' 'Av coorse, maister,' said Henry. 'Sartin', said George. And the chairman was elected.

The first business tonight was the parson's reading of the accounts, showing the distribution of the parish charities. These charities used to be given in kind. There was no end of bickering. So now they are distributed in cash, and do, perhaps, almost as much harm as good. For, as every one who likes to claim gets his or her share—twenty or thirty shillings—widows and the infirm feel that money goes to cottagers in reasonably comfortable circumstances that, were it given to them, would make a difference in their housekeeping.

The money would reach more deserving folk if the parson used the discretion he possesses under the bequests; but, by sharing out to everybody who asks for a share, he saves himself bother. His desire, his motto, his principle of life, a good deal of his religion, is 'not to cause trouble in the parish, not to hurt people's feelings in any way', and it usually lands him in trouble and the inflaming of several people's feelings.

If you ask me how far this hamlet has to go in social development before it will be ready to agree to the devotion of these comparatively useless charities to some 'object of public utility'—the objects of the testators are certainly not being carried out—I say frankly that I do not know.

The second and last business at the parish meeting was the choosing of an overseer of the poor. This is an office taken in turn by one of the farmers of the parish, which is, of course, more extensive than the hamlet.

An overseer's work is a thankless job. In one neighbouring parish a farmer's son, in another a farmer's daughter, undertakes the

work for a small fee. In a third parish one farmer after the other does the collecting. In the parish the meeting of which we are attending the five farmers are supposed to make up an annual purse of five pounds for the professional tax collector of a near-by little town.

For this reward, when he gets it—two farmers in a small way will not contribute—he gathers in the rates, writes up the books of assessments, and fills up the various forms. The overseers—overseers because the overseer of the preceding year serves with the new overseer—have simply to put their signatures where the professional has pencilled. They also see that various notices so signed by them are speared on a nail on a board in the church porch.

As for the election of district councillor and poor-law guardian, this took place not at the parish meeting, but at the close of an entertainment. As we were moving from our seats the parson got up and said that he did not wish to serve any longer, and that he had a nomination paper with him and wanted nominations. No one responded in such a high matter. So 'the Reverend' suggested somebody, and called a labourer and the wheelwright forward to be the candidate's mover and seconder to the extent of signing the nomination form. Next day the form was nailed up on the chestnut tree on the green.

The paper hung there for a week until it blew down, and no other candidate came forward. So, in a few days, a form from the clerk of the district council and poor-law guardians—and of everything official or semi-official for miles round that has to have a clerk—duly announced to the candidate his attainment to the dignity for which he had been chosen, and threatened him that if he did not, within a month, sign, before the clerk or two fellow councillor-guardians, a declaration of acceptance, he would be fined a pound.

ELECTED PERSONS

The man who prides himself on a hard head, which would usually be better described as a thin head, may and constantly does fall into a confirmed manner of judging character and circumstance, so narrow, one-sided, and elaborately artificial, as to make common sense shudder.—*John Morley*

THE farmer who is district councillor and poor-law guardian is supposed to go to a district council meeting and a guardians' meeting (held in the same room, one after the other) every fortnight. He is also on a committee of the 'institution', formerly 'workhouse' committee, which meets on council and board of guardians day.

Two of the councillor-guardians have never been to a meeting except to make their legal acknowledgment of acceptance of office. Some attend occasionally. About two dozen out of the three dozen are pretty regular in their appearance.

Indeed, the two dozen or so manifest no little public spirit. Many of them are constant in their attendance at committees, feel their responsibilities to the full, and are ready to take a good deal of trouble on behalf of the institution. The office makes the public servant. Of course the reporters of the two local papers are present and members sometimes get their names in print.

At every meeting the guardians spend a lot of time in deciding just what relief allowances are to be made by the two relieving officers, who open two big books of entries. 'A good worker in his time and no mistake.' 'No grouser was old Dick, worked for me years.' 'A truly hard case, gentlemen.' 'Always has had her house tidy has Nancy.' 'A piteous accident, Mr. Chairman.' Such phrases are often in the guardians' mouths and the allowances are marked in a certain accordance with these sentiments.

Sometimes when a man has asked for an increase in his relief money, or, for his physical good, has been refused further relief

and been told to come into the institution, he appears in the board-room. He is always either a mentally or a physically crippled creature.

One man who had to appear before the guardians because he persisted that he would not come into the institution but would have relief, was, the relieving officer said, 'always verminous when living by himself, gentlemen; he's none too clean now.' And those who sat close to where the pitiful three-quarter-witted shambler shifted from one foot to the other were in little doubt about this. 'He has been in the institution times,' said the officer, 'and has been got clean; but he always leaves, and is in the old state again.'

There is no reason for doubting that the poor chap is indulgently treated in the institution—the guardians decided that his relief should be stopped in order to bring him in once more—or that the relieving officers are attentive and considerate.

It is plain to those who, fortnight after fortnight, listen to the relieving officers' recital of the miserable condition of crippled, cancerous, or otherwise afflicted people, that these officials are sincerely anxious to get the best done for the sufferers that is possible. Many of the poor people are in trouble owing to the death or removal of their children—'married and have as much as they can do for themselves'. The relieving officers now and then propose a scale of relief beyond what is agreed to, and usually their advice on the amounts of money and food which should be allowed is followed.

Where most of the guardian-councillors, if left without a tactful head from their more enlightened colleagues—or their officers—are inclined to be parsimonious is in fixing the salaries of the staff and in providing furniture. (A friend of mine on a distant board-council writes to me, 'Our body does not act by any means inhumanely to the poor, but in other matters of administration it is meanness personified.')

Many of the members do not easily understand, for example, that any woman won't do for the assistant-matron's job—'Could not a suitable woman be got economically at a registry office

in ——?' one guardian asked—or that the medical officer has sometimes to spend on his cases more time than they themselves would like to give up for the money he is paid.

They do not lack kindness of heart. What they are short of is imagination and a realization of the fact that there are things that they know little or nothing about. But that is what ails most of us.

And politicians they follow, and writers in the papers they read, are constantly babbling pestilent things about the burden of rates without showing what is achieved by the rates.

Is it any wonder that some guardians, whose lives are mostly spent on their own farms or their neighbours', with the market-day break, are inclined to become rather Guardians of the Rates than Guardians of the Poor?

But there are others. The institution committee was once asked by the master to come out into the yard to look at some old bedsteads. They had been in the infirmary for half a century. It was a question of ordering a hundred new ones. On returning to the board-room, the committee, to the master's evident distress, seemed reluctant to buy as many as that at once.

Whereupon there rose to his feet—it is not common at the council-guardians' meetings to address the chair so formally—an old farmer, to whom speaking away from his hearth, the market ordinary, and his farm, was something new. With mingled embarrassment, indignation, determination, and unaccustomed emotion, he burst out: 'Mr. Chairman, I shall never be found wanting, I hope, when there is any means of keeping down our heavy rates. (*Gasp.*) But I do trust (*becoming red*) I shall never forget that I am (*with emphasis*) a Guardian of the Poor. Let them have their beds, for God's sake.' They had them.

Then there was a day when the ram in the hamlet went wrong and there was no water, and some one wrote a more urgent than literate postcard to the chairman of the council instead of to the paid official concerned. The very next day the chairman-farmer motored over, and for half an hour stood in the water at the power house, patiently adjusting the ram himself. When, with every thing going to his satisfaction, he prepared to return home, he pu

the key of the ram-house in his coat pocket. 'Too many people fiddling with this ram, may be,' he said; 'I'll just keep the key a bit myself.' And there has been no trouble since.

No, not much ails the hearts of our local rulers. It is not their hearts, but their history, their social notions, their economics, their teachers, that are behind the times.

Education in other things than their calling and the ways of the part of the world they live in is what they have missed and are missing, and such stirring up and encouragement on the spiritual side as they would get were their parsons more commonly fit for their job.

It is noticeable how much the working level of a guardians-council is raised when there are a few members—an old naval or military officer, an ex-administrator, a retired townsman, a sensible woman, even an author—who have had a different education and been in a wider world than the rest. The farmers and tradesmen are usually willing to accept a lead which is obviously prompted by information and experience and is offered without manifestations of self-importance.

Good humour and the English readiness to fall in with a working arrangement acceptable to the majority are constantly shown. But for their sorry, if understandable prejudices, the farmers and tradesmen are, in the main, good fellows to work with.

As I have said, they are always willing to take a reasonable amount of trouble.

Problems which come before them often show themselves surprisingly different from what they had been supposed to be. One day a guardian ejaculated something about casuals which many members might have been inclined to approve. But the general feeling was at once against him when the master said quietly, 'After twenty years' experience as a master of an institution, gentlemen, I have come to the conclusion that half the casuals in England are mentally deficient.'

And at such an institution as many as ten thousand 'destitute wayfarers'—or five thousand who are mentally deficient—may call in a twelvemonth.

On few rural guardians has it dawned that the miseries which the poor-law administration attempts to alleviate, the wrongs with which it endeavours to cope have an economic basis, that 'charity' is not enough, that most of the distressing work of 'relief' is a costly ladling out of water from the bath without turning off the taps.

Most guardians see only the burden on the rates, and grumble. They know little or nothing of the causes of the heavy expenditures. What chance have they of hearing of the causes? As I have asked, what teachers have they to deal faithfully with them?

Nor are 'the poor' any longer there in the 'workhouse' before the guardians' eyes. Many 'workhouses' have been closed, and those which survive as 'poor-law institutions' become more and more infirmaries, asylums for the mentally deficient, and casual wards.

It is outside the institution, in every village and hamlet of the Union district, that 'the relief of the poor' now goes on. There, with the better-off hardly conscious of what is happening, 'out relief' is being paid to the diseased, to the infirm, to healthy but burdened widows who are doing what they can, to old men and women who had no chance of saving out of their wages, to the feckless and their progeny, and to the foster-mothers of boarded-out children.

It is no wonder that compassionate relieving officers, whose lives are spent in contact with such suffering, dejection, misfortune, and moral weakness, are often grim of countenance. The world they move about in must seem not only a sad world but a mad world.

For what the community does is this. It spends—have you any conception how much?—in educating a village child from infancy into its teens, and then it proceeds to leave the young life almost to itself until, at any rate, it votes or marries. Thereafter, in the keeping up of gaols, asylums, infirmaries and poor-law institutions, and in footing the bills of relieving officers, the community pays sullenly the ghastly price of its neglect!

In the board-room it is only possible to deal with the results of

poverty, drink, vile housing and the ignorance for which the unimaginative educational system of the past and a feckless Church have been responsible—put the four causes of destitution, unworthiness and physical weakness, in any order you choose. Outside the board-room, who is visualizing for the guardians the sowing of the crop that they will be called on to gather in, who is taking them to the ballot-box about it all?

Perhaps the board-room itself is the place in which some effort might be made to get a look at the roots of the problems which the guardians are facing. One is struck by the headway which is made with a somewhat unsympathetic board by a visiting Ministry of Health inspector who has aplomb and information. Why should not the Ministry of Health, and even some voluntary bodies, try to arrange for pithy, taking, informal talks on different aspects of poor-law administration for delivery, by invitation, before or after guardians' meetings? If only a handful of members attended it would be worth while.

The Ministry of Health, in propagandizing, is not so far forward as the Ministry of Agriculture. Why should it not produce readable, gratis leaflets, in the style of some of the excellent Ministry of Agriculture tracts, on the work of a district councillor, the work of a poor-law guardian, and the work and opportunities of parish councils and parish meetings?

But word-of-mouth instruction would be better than print. The informality with which guardian-councillors are accustomed to exchange views at their meetings would facilitate the introduction of a sympathetic speaker.

This informality—most of the speakers sit, as I have noted, and almost every one of them smokes—has, however, its drawbacks. The smoking, for instance, must be a trial for the one woman member. But there is adequate discussion—often too prolonged discussion—and decisions are taken in accordance with what the Quakers call the evident sense of the meeting.

I should not omit to mention that the members are scrupulous to pay for the lunches provided in the institution on guardians-council days, and that no signs of graft in administration are nowadays visible.

It would help greatly towards leavening the guardians-council if more people with a wider outlook than the average farmer or tradesman member were elected. But the problem is not so simple as it looks.

The mind of a farmer or tradesman member may be no wider than the world he habitually lives in. It may also be possessed by wrong notions of, say, 'economy'. Yet such a member may be doing useful service in his way. It takes all sorts to make a district council or a board of guardians. All wisdom is not with what may be dubbed the intellectuals.

Service in local administration is indeed a valuable discipline for the intellectuals of a countryside. The useful administrator is not necessarily the clever or the well-read man. For workaday wear it is the 'sensible' man or woman who is most needed. No administrative virtues are more useful than the modest ones: experience, common sense and industry. These virtues many farmer and tradesman members constantly display. The intellectuals on a guardians-council are brought away from theory and paper to the art of rubbing along with people, and of getting things done.

Some of the farmer-tradesmen members know better than the intellectual members the people of the little world for which they are called on to legislate. Farmer-tradesmen members, in their harping on 'economy', are often undiscerning, unreasonable and absurd. But frequently they are right in substance.

It is a sound instinct that causes the membership of the finance committee to be regarded as a distinction, and its meetings to be better attended than the meetings of other committees. It cannot be said that at these finance committee meetings the cheeseparer spirit is uppermost. It is rather a desire to be 'businesslike' that is prevalent, that and a natural wish to ease the burden of the rate for everybody.

The councillor-guardian intellectual needs to be made to face reality now and then. And there is some ground, if a remarkably diminished ground, for the rooted suspicion of bureaucracy at Whitehall.

The intellectuals score when some farmer or tradesman member

protests against, say, a 1s. 3d. county education rate, and looks back regretfully to the time when it was 'a single copper'. Then the intellectual, out of his wider knowledge and sympathies, has the chance of showing cogently, if he is as alert and non-magisterial as he ought to be, just what the expenditures are from which a generation of education has helped to save the county. Ten to one he makes his point, and it is welcome 'copy' to the reporters, as often as not in secret sympathy.

One way in which members who are neither farmers nor tradesmen are sometimes at a disadvantage is in not being so well placed for a vehicle as their agricultural colleagues. People with brains who take to rural life are not always well off. A motor a fortnight may mean £15 a year, in addition to time lost.

In that reform of local government which cannot be far off, the question of allowing mileage to members of district councils and boards of guardians, as members of county councils are allowed it, is pressing.

The weakness of the county councils is that only men of some leisure and means can afford to be on them, for there are not only the regular meetings, but the constant committees to attend.

The standstill element on all councils, but particularly county councils, would be reduced at once if working men and people who are not working men but have to count their pounds, could serve. There would be no trouble about electing both manual workers and brain workers. As it is, areas which would be able to choose progressive councillors are represented by out-of-date or indifferent persons, and there is a lack of interest in the county council elections and in the proceedings of the councils which hinders wise advance.

It is difficult to understand why county council electors should have to go as far as the ordinary Parliamentary polling places to vote, not seldom three miles or so away.

Why should not local elections be held in the parish school-rooms under the direction of the schoolmaster or schoolmistress and the nearest magistrate? Even were there an occasional irregularity, would it be too high a price to pay for an increase in the effective electorate and a new interest in local government?

Without the development of such interest it is idle to expect things to go much better on county councils. We shall continue to be far away from the far-sighted attitude of that devoted public worker, the late Rev. Stewart Headlam, who when the rate collector at his door said, 'Rates are up, sir,' ejaculated, 'Thank God!'

Some public-spirited newcomer in a district may make opportunities of pressing home the value and interest of the work done by local bodies, and may, by explanation and encouragement, raise the attendance at even a parish meeting from a usual five to thirty or so; but without travelling expenses for district as well as county councillors, and more convenient polling places for county council electors, the progress that can be made must be slow.

Obviously the work of training the rural electorate in citizenship is best done early.

School teachers in conference have complained of their schools being used as polling stations; but surely some useful reflection of the reason for the setting up of the polling booths in the schools and the giving of a holiday on election day reaches the children? Well might one enlightened rural schoolmistress say to me, 'It is one of the most delightful parts of the school work, to try to rouse and guide the children's small beginnings in the growth of public spirit.'

It is much to be wished, in my opinion, that schoolmasters and schoolmistresses could be more frequently on public bodies.

One way which has been tried, by way of bringing into children's minds some notions of public service, is this. A hamlet was littered with old tins, potsherds and other rubbish. The school-children were invited to elect two of their number, a boy and a girl, each year as village marshals. Their work was to see to the clearing away of the rubbish. Padded arm badges, with the parish emblem on them, were made and formally presented to the children at the annual parish meeting. Occasion was also taken to let the children handle two venerable truncheons (which had belonged to village constables in the place) in order to make them feel that they were in the line of succession. The local constable was also asked

to treat the child marshals with deference if he should meet them wearing their badges. In a year or so, the marshals and their willing boy and girl helpers cleared away nearly two tons of rubbish.

The last word must be that the effective reform of local government lies, in a very large measure, like all reform, through the School and the Church.

SOWS' EARS FOR PURSES

All the circumstances make the spirit of combination falter in the country. In towns men are face to face with the brutal realities of their lives, unsoftened by any of the assuaging influences of brook and glade and valley. Men and women who work in the fields breathe something of the resignation and peace of Nature; they bear trouble and wrong with a dangerous patience. Discontent moves, but it moves slowly; whereas storms blow up in the towns, they beat up in the country.—*J. L. and B. Hammond's 'Village Labourer'*

LAST Friday I was at a ticket barrier at a London terminus. The collector stopped me. 'This train', he said, 'does not stop at your station.' I waited for a few moments until the press of passengers should be passed. Then the collector took his staff train list out of his pocket and whipped over its leaves. After doing so he said, 'Sorry, sir; my mistake; train does stop.'

Earlier in the day, in one of the best-known London shops, I had been served by an attentive and intelligent-looking man. When I gave him my address I found that it was possible for a responsible assistant in a big metropolitan business house that every day sends goods all over England to hear of such county abbreviations 'as Hants', 'Berks' and 'Oxon' for the first time.

An hour or two before I had been at a large branch of the largest London bank. When I asked an obliging middle-aged counter clerk if, in a country a night's journey away, the exchange were against us, he did not know.

These three successive surprises on one urban afternoon are not easy to credit. Nor is the life of the hamlet. I begin to ask myself whether, in order to carry conviction, I have surprised you enough!

Farm workers, farmers, parsons, and squires take a deal of knowing, like you and me. They are, as we are, to no pattern.

They are to be seen, just like you and me, in one hour in one aspect, in another hour in quite another aspect. Their natures,

like yours and mine, may be scenes of struggle. They are, as we are, in the clutch of circumstance.

When the portraits of farm workers, farmers, parsons, and squires are being made there are things that have to be put in which may seem to be unreasonable, harsh, unjust. But these warts belong to the picture as much as the decent, friendly, humoursome things.

Naturally, I feel most for the bottom dog of the community. Farmers, parsons, and squires have their buffetings, but their world is not so shut in as the labourers' world. 'The labourer, was I to have no feeling for him?' One understands how Cobbett came to write that. To the labourer, as to the pre-war moujik, it must often seem that 'God is in Heaven and the Tsar is far away'.

As I have said, many of the best labourers, in some places most or *all* of the best labourers, are gone. But there are still in the countryside more labourers than farmers, parsons or squires.

When we turn from numbers to qualities, and consider grain and temper, then fret and burden and sorrow seem to have wrought more noticeably in the labouring class than in the other three classes of rural society.

And, measured by a scale of real morals and manners, and, if you like—not to go so very far back—descent, the labouring folk do not markedly fall behind their better-off neighbours. Physique and bearing—in which unbalanced food, odious housing, a pitiful taking of pills and potions, and a lack of leisure tell their tale—are the only things in which there is not much of a muchness among many farm workers and many farmers, parsons and squires.

But the human heart, as we have all thankfully to acknowledge, is incurably romantic.

So our minds are not on the real labourer, any more than they are on the real farmer, the real parson or the real squire.

Our minds hold, for example, a picture of a queer or a comic labourer, or, if we are politicians, of a voter-labourer. Let me but write now one sentence on labourers' or labourers sons' or daughters' baseness, and I jar your feelings.

But if I call upon your reason, you are likely to agree, I think, that moral feebleness, showing itself in slyness, silly chicanery and paltry malevolence, is as likely to fit into a truthful account of some labouring men and women as all that is pleasant, brave, self-sacrificing and of good hope in the walk and conversation of their class. Good-hearted and enlightened masters and mistresses—no novices from town who took curtseys and councillorships for granted, and imagined that benevolent membership of a village club or women's institute committee was a key to village life—have a few sad things in their memories.

But the wells of understanding and compassion are not thereby dried up. The water renews itself from a sure spring. Trust in the future is based on sympathetic understanding; not on seeming, but on observed facts and the known history of the labourer and of human nature; not on amiable talk and writing, but on facing reality and on resolutely going to the roots of what is so badly wrong.

'She died of consumption in a room on a brick floor with no chimney.' That is how old Joe's wife died.

Fifty yards from the parson's door, Sally Miggs has just had her second illegitimate. A few months hence her sister Ethel will be having her first. Need it be mentioned that, with the Sunday papers full of contraceptive advertisements, the number of illegitimate children in cottages is no more an accurate indication of the immorality which prevails in the labouring class than the number of illegitimate children in Marylebone and Mayfair is an indication of their moral state. 'Young men go to Sally and Ethel's cottage.' How else have Sally and Ethel lived? They lost their situations, and their mother drinks.

An old bed-ridden labourer of high character and marked undeveloped ability passed away last week. He had over his mantelpiece a certificate testifying to his ploughman skill. He once said to me: 'Maister, 'e told another fairmer times, he did. "Aye," says 'e, "Billy's worth a pun a week to me, that's wot 'e is." But he nivver give Oi a pun. He nivver give it me. Oi nivver had no pun. Oi nivver had but twel' shillun' and then thirteen, nobbut twel' shilliun and then thirteen.'

One blustering day, when I clambered to his cold garret, Billy's eyes were closed. 'It were fair bondage,' he muttered. 'It were a bondage,' he repeated. His mind had gone back to the life that drove him, a master of his calling, to take his stand with Arch—and lose his job.

When the old man's eyes opened they rested dully on the rude unbarked rafters of his unceiled roof, between two stone slates of which a sparrow would sometimes thrust its head. I drew the bed rug to the chin of the coughing man, and, as the worn chest got easier, tried to cheer the broken veteran.

The General Election was on and he was eager to know how things were going. I assured him that his stout struggle with niggardly pay and cramped opportunity had not been in vain, that even as he was leaving this world, the light of hope was breaking for the countryside. Parties were jostling one another with plans for its welfare.

'But be they a-goin' to do anythin', sir?' came a broken voice that was almost a wail. And in a moment or two the dying man, wonderfully roused, went on, 'I mind one Lord Win-Winchy-summat [Lord Winchilsea], he seemed a goodish man; what happened to his society, did ye know, sir?' And after waiting for breath, he said, 'Even Arch never seemed to do naught once he was up in Parlyment and that there club.'

It is with this suspicion and distrust, born of ill-usage and disappointment, that rural programmes are heard of by the villager. It is with stinging memories of such gallant men as this skilled shepherd, braving out his last bleak days, after painstaking and loyal labour for his masters and pioneer efforts for his fellows, that many people in the country who are not labourers come to the reading of the talk of right honourable gentlemen.

A few nights before he died, Billy—his bed had been brought down, for warmth's sake, to the tiny kitchen—heard of the five shillings a week rise in wages for the county, bringing the least competent worker's pay up to 30s. a week (Not a few farmers have countered by doubling rents and getting 'permits' to pay lower wages to elderly men and to men who are 'not quite all

there'.) Politicians and public opinion had done something! It was a sum far beyond what he had ever hoped for when he struggled stoutly for himself and others by the side of Arch. The tears ran down his face.

After a little, in a voice which, if humbled, was full of courtesy, he said he was 'wore out, wore out truly, mortil weary and wishful for the end'.

This man had worked hard and honourably—if his work had been lawyering or preaching one would have written 'with distinction'—from childhood until, in his seventies, he could work no more. But for his leaving of the world he had not been able to get for himself the quiet and seclusion that many a dying animal is able to secure. There was no decent sanctuary for his last mortal frailty and dolour. In an ill-flagged room, where there was coming and going, eating and cooking, and wearing talk, he faced as best he could an experience of which he felt all the awesomeness. Because his life had been one long as-best-he-could, he faced it.

'Was I not to feel indignation,' asked Cobbett, 'against those who had degraded the class to which they owed their ease?'

William Hampson, in his delirium, insisted on having his digging fork stood up by his bedside and his hedge-hook laid on his bed cover, 'handy-like', and moaned his anxiety to bring the work of some overtasked day of the 'sixties to such a finish as should satisfy his craftsman instincts.

William Hampson was abominably oppressed by a social system with which many people still see little real fault.

And what of Joe Little, who 'took to drink soon as he was married', because he married into squalor that, had parson and school and masters and mistresses done their part, need never have been?

Or Sarah Hobkin, who, when she had to lock up her cottage to go for a day's work in the fields, used to take her children's dinner to the foot of her slatternly garden and shut it up safe for them in the stinking privy? Who felt responsibility for her?

Or for the young labourers who write in for jobs on the railway but get no reply, for, said the minor official, 'We don't need to see

em; their little i's and their messin' of their spellin' tells what they're like'—the abandoned of the community since these lads left education behind them at fourteen?

Or for Shepherd Harry, whose mind it had been nobody's business to draw out beyond the point at which he was unable to say much more of his calling than that 'no man 'ave seen more 'bortions than I 'ave'?

Or for young Jonas, who, with his parents' complaints of the old days of compulsory beans and bacon in his mind, would never plant beans in his garden: 'Beans,' he said, 'is nowt but muck to our 'ouse'?

Or for the labourer's daughters, servantmaids who are without a home tradition of self-respecting honesty, of wise thrift, of tidiness or of pride of work; and their brothers, who lack honour, largely because, as we know very well, as a high Tory, recalling the days of his youth, remembers, 'miserably low wages were supplemented by the rates', and the labourer 'was a mere serf tied to his parish, entirely in the hands of the farmer'?

'The Poor Law,' one finds Mr. Fowler declaring in his *Echoes of Old Country Life*, 'has engendered the utter thriftlessness which led to the downfall and almost to the destruction of the principle of independence. It has destroyed many of the most honourable feelings of domestic life.'

But there is no need to go to a book. It was of these feckless, slippery young men and women's own grandfather that William Hampson once spoke to me: 'If ever a poor man had bitter 'ardships 'twere 'e. A big family he had and ten shillun' a week. No wunner eggs don't stay, they tell, in nesteses near where they Pudseys be.'

Of all the burdens by which the labouring class are harassed, however, none is more hurtful than the cast-off notions of their more fortunate 'betters'. These out-of-date beliefs and sanctions, abandoned a generation or two generations ago, took root in the cottages alongside the driftwood of old farmhouse and great house furniture. These rags of a stale mentality are the last indignity borne by the labouring class.

A long time passes before the new-comer to the country realizes in what a different world of ideas and customs so many of the people of the cottages live. Think of the Neolithic beliefs of the mother of a large family, distinguished for its skill at whist drives, and for taking three Sunday papers, who said of a weakling baby whose twin sister had died, 'Ah, the baby won't thrive none till the dead 'un be rotted.'

Think of the young stockman brought up so unbelievably that when, at the first-aid class, he saw in the teacher's oleographic wall picture what a human inside was like, he fainted.

It seemed so precisely suitable and urgent for our clamant needs when the hamlet was invited, by a bill about a bazaar in the next parish, tacked up on the tree on the green, to support the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

It was *not* of that bazaar that some one was writing to me when he said, 'I shall never forget the joy on old Joe's face nor the sparkle in the eye of old Hephzibah.'

And when, one Sunday afternoon, a famous, but to our hamlet wholly unknown, visitor read very simply the account of the death of Socrates, a heathen heard of for the first time, one girl cried, and another said to her mistress afterwards, 'Please, 'm, would the master, do you think, kindly lend me that book that has in it about that man, for, my sister, she says, she'd like to read the first part of his life?'

One night, in another experiment, a great 'cellist played to labourers' families scraps of the best music. 'Aye, sir,' said a labourer, 'that *were* music. I could have set another hour.' What the 'cellist said afterwards was, 'I never had so *beaming* an audience.'

Our state, as we say in our speech, is 'easier felt than telt'.

CHAPTER 19

MONDAY TO SATURDAY

Not so much to be called bad as unfit for England.—*Cromwell*

WHAT happens—or does not happen—in the hamlet on Sundays has been told. From Monday to Saturday the farmers and the schoolmistress rule the day, and the wireless and the ‘public’ rule the night.

The hands of the schoolmistress are upheld, in ways we know little of, by the Board of Education and the county council. Even the schoolmistress’s uncertificated assistant, the wheelwright’s daughter, feels enough independence of the parson to be absent from church when she is inclined to visit the chapel in the next hamlet, or to take a walk with the son of Farmer Richardson’s bailiff.

The schools of all the hamlets nearest to us are Church schools like ours. None of their schoolmistresses has quite the combination of intelligence, public spirit, and understanding of the idea of education possessed by our Miss Bird. But they are all devoted, honest women, who earn their pay and a bit over.

The best of them is a widow, who does wonders with a wretchedly planned, ill-lighted school, and keeps her young parson in order.

Another schoolmistress, a great reader, is the sharp-tongued, somewhat querulous second wife of a carpenter and small-holder in a very small way. She is at open war with her extremely ‘High’ parish priest.

Schoolmistress number three is behind the day in her methods, but she has a stirring way with her children of all ages, and she mothers her rather futile, good-hearted bachelor parson, who thinks she is wonderful.

The fourth schoolmistress is a sourish, earnest, straight up-and-down, silent woman, who, without anyone having an inkling of

what was afoot, became engaged to a farmer from Canada, farming five miles away from us, and is therefore resigning her post. Passive resistance, or what a past age would have called silent disdain, has been her sufficient weapon with her vicar's wife.

Lest you should be inclined to sympathize a little with the pastors of these rather grim and resolute, but really rather odd and nervous women—how could they be anything else?—I may shed such light on the make-up of the clergymen as is afforded by the fact that only two of them, as I have recorded, have been known to lift their hats to the schoolmistresses of their parishes.

Two generations of the inhabitants of the four hamlets have received an impress of the characters of Miss Bird and her colleagues, and of the farmers and the parsons of the hamlets, 'the lieutenants of God'.

But things are to be not a little altered in the future in our hamlet and in many other hamlets. Schemes are afoot at the county education offices under which the smaller children will remain in their schools, but the bigger ones will be motored to more advanced schools which exist or will be built a few miles away.

Miss Bird, along with two of the best of the schoolmistresses of our neighbouring hamlets, may be transferred—it is not certain—to posts in the better schools, and the three hamlets may be the poorer by the loss of the public spirit of these good women. Our school and the other hamlet Church schools for the smaller children may fall back into the hands of lower-grade teachers, of parson 'correspondents', and of the farmer and farmer's wife school managers who still believe that the three R's or thereabouts are enough for any labourer's child. That is, until the scandal of these ill-managed, ill-found, ill-taught Church schools—there are many Church schools which are well conducted—is brought home to the public conscience, and they are made in reality the Council schools they are in financial fact. (The maintenance of the Church school building is the only burden on Church people. As this is frequently too much for them, the improvements made are often the bare minimum which will stop proceedings. The

county council does not aid Church schools structurally, but is willing to take over these buildings from the Church authorities.)

Such a change is not so far distant. Look at the spirit which inspires the educational authority in an essentially rural county, Cambridgeshire. As the Cambridgeshire secretary of education writes (*The Village College*, Cambridge University Press): 'The village school with an average attendance of 100 and under is not susceptible of organization on any sound principle, and the small numbers of scholars do not allow of the provision of the staff, accommodation, and equipment which make a wider curriculum possible. The small school is both inadequate and expensive'.

The picture is complete except for the dulling stuffiness, the joylessness, the clumping and scraping of the children's boots on the worn flooring with the nails pushing up, and the coughing.

And something else. The heart of Miss Bird yearns towards the lads between ten and leaving time, whom she has cared for since the time she taught them to use their handkerchiefs. The building of their characters goes steadily forward in her hands.

What happens when the plan of grouping is adopted is this.

In a certain area in Cambridgeshire there were three Church schools and a Council school. Under the new scheme one Church school was closed, the other two Church schools were organized as schools for children under ten, and the Council school was enlarged and made the senior school for the area. In that senior school 'the children of 10 to 15 are graded in classes according to age and attainment, each under the charge of a qualified teacher. Handicrafts, domestic subjects, and gardening form an integral part of the training. Great importance is attached to the teaching of English (the school produces a play once a year), to local history, and to physical training. There is a strong corporate life, and there are thriving athletic and hobby clubs. The school has its colours, with a school cap for the boys, and a smock and a cap for the girls. The children from a distance take their midday meal together under the charge of a teacher.'

Generally, the senior-school system 'has made it possible to

attract a new type of teacher to the countryside'. 'Apart from specially qualified teachers, there are now ten head and assistant teachers in Cambridgeshire who are graduates of Oxford, Cambridge, London, Glasgow, Wales and Birmingham'. (For the way in which the difficulty that county councils are in in grouping schools, some of which are Council and some Church, has been got over in Cambridgeshire, read a fine piece of writing, done by a committee of Cambridge heads, schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, Churchmen and Free Churchmen, and 'Q', and published under the title of *The Cambridge Syllabus of Religious Teaching for Schools*. Also the *Children's Bible* and *Little Children's Bible*, all published in cheap paper-backed editions by the Cambridge University Press.)

Welcome to such teachers bringing a breath from a bigger world! But how is the hamlet, grown-ups as well as children, to get on without Miss Bird?

Perhaps the grown-ups, or most of them, are past helping very far. Did you ever look in on a gathering of women in such a remote hamlet as I have in mind? Would you like a foreign friend to see, as a sample of rural England, a photograph of such a bodily and mentally fretted group as that? What of its physique, its bearing, its usages, its beliefs, its secrets?

Though Miss Bird may not have been able to do much with such dreary ones—the social residuum from which we turn our eyes and our thought—she has always an opportunity when Nature offers the hamlet its second chance in its children.

A few of them may be a little bow-legged, rickety and wan. Some of them may be grievously burdened with parental and grand- and great-grand-parental shifts and frailty. But there are gleams of hope among them in which faith and experience may raise their pennons.

It is just such children who need the best sort of teaching, not the second best, if we take teaching seriously. What could be worse for our hamlet than that its children should be under the influence of a less competent and less experienced, because younger and less adequately paid, teacher than it has had? The children want more, not less, money spent on them.

If the children do not receive ineffaceable impressions before the age of ten, what can the very best of senior schools do with them after ten?

And how is the courage of the lone teacher of our hamlet to be sustained if, after bringing on the children from the infant forms to ten, she is to lose them when they are beginning to bud? It may be possible to sustain it, but how?

You would hardly believe me if I told you of the kind of girls some parsons have their eye on as likely candidates for the post of teacher for the young children whom the Miss Birds may leave behind them.

But I am not downcast.

The Time Spirit has its eye on those unbelieving believers. Forces too strong for them are gathering strength and closing in. Says a paragraph in one of the daily papers—the others did not know real news when they saw it: ‘A Conference of representatives of the National Farmers’ Union and the National Union of Teachers, including members of the Rural Schools Advisory Committee, and representatives of the National Union of Agricultural Workers and the agricultural section of the Workers’ Union, was held at Hamilton House, London, on Friday.’

Let us have excellent senior schools by all means, but to starve the junior schools of the hamlets is to cut at the roots of our hopes of the reformation of rural England.

But, as I say, I am not downcast. When I had written so far, I sent my manuscript to an eminent authority in the realm of rural education, and this is what he writes:

‘Insist on the county Education Committee supplying an experienced teacher. Sometimes—not often—an experienced uncertificated teacher is quite good. But insist on a certificated teacher, one who has been trained in infant methods. It is possible to be content with one who is about 26, so that the expense will not be too great. (This to mollify the county authority.) Write to the Director of Education for the county, who will be sympathetic. Then write to the Board of Education and see H.M.

Inspector. Kick up enough fuss and you will get a certificated teacher for your junior school—or be allowed to retain Miss Bird. In my county we invariably leave the head-teacher alone when we decapitate small schools.'

Well, a fuss is being kicked up, and I have copied out the foregoing hints, so that every interested reader will know how to kick up a fuss in his or her hamlet too.

‘IMMORTAL SPIRIT GROWS’

You write as if you believed that everything is bad.
Nay, but I believe that everything might be better.

‘FARMERS in general read nothing,’ wrote a rural student a century ago in his direct way, ‘but are under the control of parsons and landlords.’ More of our English agriculturists than might be supposed are still at ease in a battered parson-and-squire-led Zion, worse battered, of course, than they have any conception of. So situated, they feel safe. They have a sense of social propriety, of patriotic propriety.

They are many of them young men. The minds of these young men have been stretched farther than the intellects of their sires, and they have seen some allegiances shaken; but most of the young farmers are ranged with their elders and keep step with them, the parsons, and the landlords.

In such company they know where they are. All’s right with their world (as far as they feel themselves responsible for it) as ducks feel theirs to be as they march along in single file.

Of the to-be-suspected rest of the community (except the labourers) they have commonly little first-hand information. They believe of it mainly what they have heard of it from neighbours and relatives who believe mainly what *they* have heard of it.

In talk before young farmers, a political speaker with good humour—a safer thing than humour—a little rural knowledge that is sound as far as it goes, and his wits about him, may deceive himself into thinking that he is making some progress, but on polling day the young farmers will vote as farmers have always voted.

There is no question that the younger generation has been a little better school-taught than the men who held their farms before them. It has become used to a daily paper, if it does not read

much of it that matters. It has the stimulus of an alert and moderately intelligent trade union. It is provided with farming papers with more pictures in them and better edited pages than they used to have.

The younger generation has made acquaintance with new-fangled, even foreign developments, like sugar-beet growing. It is accustomed to occasional visits to London. It is habituated to motors and cinemas. It is stirred and set thinking a little by wireless. It has got into the way of nodding with some respect to agricultural science.

But a great mistake is made in glozing, as is so easily and agreeably done, the mental out-of-dateness of a large number of farmers, young and old. Criticism is too commonly disarmed by the calm and good-natured smile that are the products of an open-air life, plenty of food, simple aims, a moderate rate of expenditure, and the confidence given by inherited technical knowledge and ability.

The townsman approaches the agriculturist with a friendly feeling for a man who, though he seems backward in some ways, looks kindly and hard-working. 'We have been town-dwellers all our life,' wrote a townsman lately, 'but we have a feeling for country people.'

The townsman easily feels respect and regard for the farmer. He is taken by his hearty cheery way, his common sense, and his clear eye.

A good farmer who is a good man is a good companion. There does not seem to be anything petty about him. He is on a large scale. The art and friendliness with which he appears to handle his men are as pleasing and satisfying as his manner with his livestock. His modesty, which does not keep wholly out of sight his pride in the work of his hands and his head, is as real as his hospitality and his mother wit. He seems to be a plain shrewd fellow, a man who has learnt something from life, a meritorious citizen.

But, but, but—what has still to be said of many a skilful farmer? Acceptable spouse, respected father, friendly neighbour, good master—these are fine things for a man to be reputed to be. What

fault is to be found in him, in this person who is so little given to justifying or explaining himself?

The ground of suspicion is surely that he seems so often to be an impermeable man. It is not that he does not read. Reading may sometimes be laziness. But, with the progress of the years, the nation enlarges the codes of neighbourliness and good-mastership, and there are felt to be grounds for doubt and uncertainty about the farming class, socially and politically. The waves of progress are heard beating.

The splashed farmers are sometimes exasperated. It is not agreeable to be sprayed by the tide. Farmers, however, are not the only people to whom the basic fact of human existence has never been brought home: that movement, not quiescence, is the irrevocable lot of the inhabitants of a globe spinning at nineteen miles a second.

Undoubtedly there is change for the better in the farming class, a steady change. But there is no sense in pretending that the change is coming faster than it is in fact doing.

The heads of the agricultural profession in every county are remarkable men whom it is a pleasure and a stimulus to meet. But far more farmers than is generally understood are not farmers at all but dealers, and have the dealer's mind, often a markedly anti-social mind. Many dealer-farmers, farmer-dealers, and plain farmers are undoubtedly narrowish-minded, centred on the main chance, unenlightened regarding labour, and without much conception of service or co-operation for the common good.

Stunted minds and shrivelled hearts are not found, however, in the countryside alone. There are plenty of backward townspeople. But a hundred and one influences brought to bear on townspeople, the very conditions of their more stirring life, encourage hopes of steady improvement.

The secluded existence of mentally and morally backward farmers, their freedom from a criticism and competition that they can feel as a reflection on their own competence or character, the frequent lack of any habit of or inclination towards self-cultivation (compare the social and political interests of many a farmer with

the store of reading matter and the awakened political sense of many a Durham miner), the whip-hand of old custom that they have over the men and women who work for them, the remissness of their spiritual guides, the enervating talk of the people who shepherd them politically: these things suggest that changes of agricultural outlook and character will be slow *if everything is to go on in the countryside just as it has been doing.*

The *Punch* farmer is harder to find than he was, no doubt. But the Apocryphal question—a little towneeishly superior though it may be—has still some application: ‘How can we get wisdom from him that holdeth the plough and that glorieth in the goad, that driveth oxen and is occupied with their labours, whose talk is of bullocks? He giveth his mind to make furrows and is diligent to give kine fodder.’

To make furrows and to give kine fodder are works of merit. But men may live by livestock without being bovine. Rural civilizations of our own kin prove it. Thousands of Scots, Welsh and Danish farmers eagerly listen to technical and non-technical discussions which would have little interest for many southern English farmers, because they would comprehend them in part only. These Scots, Welsh and Danes habitually act in combination in social service and for their own improvement in ways which are foreign to the ideas of a large proportion of our agriculturists.

A list of forty-four recommendations may be found in the final report of the Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation. It has been pointed out by a lecturer on the history and economics of agriculture that more than half of these recommendations are concerned with proposals the carrying out of which must depend on the mental development of farmers.

This is true as far as it goes. What it would have been absolutely true to say is that progress depends on the mental *and moral* development of farmers. Mental development alone may take us some way, but it will not take us far. We have many clever farmers.

What we need more of are farmers—we have already many of

hem—who have not only brains, but the morality to use their brains aright in all their relationships.

Nobody who has gone below the surface of the question of effective agricultural or horticultural co-operation, in any one of the ways in which it can be applied, is in the least doubt that the fault of farmers and market gardeners who, for example, will not lay hold of the co-operative principle is as much a fault of the heart as of the head.

In the hearts of these men of the land there is suspicion and uncharitableness. The morality of unity, of effort for the common good, of the helping hand, of the fraternity of a higher civilization, is only beginning to be learnt. For the reason, of course, that the agencies on which we have relied for teaching these things have not taught them.

We are right in setting in the forefront of reform not only the mental but the moral development of the agricultural class.

Good farming which does not go hand in hand with right living leads to no goal worth reaching, is a species of robotism.

The work of making an agricultural class able must be barren if it is not joined to the work of making that class understand that farming is a means to an end, and that end a good life, for farmers and everybody else.

Vast sums are being spent, and properly spent, on agricultural research and on the teaching of rural technique. But we have to wake up to the need of teaching, and of finding out the most effective ways of teaching, all that is comprehended in rural morality.

As one meditates on the matter one comes to see that the thing that is wrong with a large proportion of the agricultural class is something which is wrong from its childhood.

It is something which is due to a snobbery which the more one travels about the world seems to be more and more markedly English.

Large farmers and the workers of an English parish are most peculiar in this, that as children they did not all sit down to learn, as in Scotland, at the desks of the same school. Democratic

feeling and belief in equal opportunity for brains and character were not cultivated during the years in which the mind takes its sharpest impressions. And the Church, in abdication of its functions in its dealings with adults, has done little or nothing to supply the sound social teaching of which they have been deprived.

Is it any wonder, then, that the result is, at the best, a social gap and, at the worst, arrogance and servility, the common products of ignorance; that there is so often arrogance among those who give orders and servility among those who take them; that the belief in social castes is engrained in bottom as well as in top dog?

One who is accustomed to deal faithfully with me once expressed the opinion that it would have been better if, instead of writing certain books and doing some things that I have attempted in various parts of the world, I had set myself to keeping school, a kind of Danish rural high school.

A Danish *højskole*, as I have often written, is a plainly equipped holiday college for farmers' and agricultural workers' sons and daughters, which vaunts itself that it teaches nothing by which it is possible to make a living.

There are sixty of these rural high schools to a Danish rural population of a million and a half!

The country men and women who attend them get, without using text-books—it is a matter of principle not to provide them—and for £3 a month all told, a stirring insight into the history of the world and their own country. These rustic students have their minds stretched and braced by tales from great biography and thrilling science. These young people, at the most impressionable period of their lives, make acquaintance with poetry, pictures, and non-sectarian religion, and cultivate their powers by athletics and singing.

By the teaching they receive, and by the companionship they enjoy with strangers of a different experience from their own, they learn something of the conditions of a healthy, happy, useful life, a life lived in the country, with the aim of pursuing not only their own good but the good of others.

The secret of the noteworthy agricultural and social develop-

ment of Denmark, which has drawn pilgrims from every country in the world, is largely to be found in the democratic warm-heartedness and understanding generated in the *højskole* and the impulse which is given there to wise living, neighbourliness and social service.

There is shortly to be opened at a place called Sawston, in wholly agricultural Cambridgeshire, the first English Village College. A delightfully written and printed booklet *The Village College*, by Henry Morris, director of education for the county, tells every interested person the inspiring story. On behalf of Sawston, the efforts of the educational and social agencies, statutory and voluntary, which exist in the countryside have been co-ordinated in a statesmanlike way. The county council, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Development Commissioners, the Carnegie Trustees—what far-reaching powers they make available for combination and concentration under the impulse of imagination and enthusiasm!

Hear the Morris wisdom, in paragraphs picked here and there from his pamphlet:

‘Itinerant adult agricultural education, rural libraries, and village halls, will always be fighting a battle already half lost, if the ablest children are stolen by the secondary schools of the towns. . . .

‘A new type of leader and teacher with a higher status and of superior calibre would at last be possible in the countryside. . . .

‘We are within measurable sight, if we use imagination and have administrative courage, of giving the countryside a number of fine and worthy buildings. The schools of rural England are never a form of art as they might and ought to be. . . .

‘A Village College—a building that will express the spirit of the English countryside, something of its modesty, something of the age-long and permanent dignity of husbandry, a building that will give the countryside a centre arousing the affection and loyalty of the country child and of country people and conferring significance on their way of life. There has been no public architecture in the English countryside since the parish churches were built—that is, since the Middle Ages. The biggest and most

impressive public buildings in the countryside are the asylums and workhouses—a sight to put all Heaven in a rage. . . .

‘ The Village College will change the whole face of the problem of rural education. There would be no ‘ leaving school ’—the child would enter at three and leave only in extreme old age ! ’

But there is nothing in this excellent piece of writing I like better than its last paragraph: ‘ The Village College would not be committed irrevocably to any intellectual or social dogma or to any sectional point of view. Intellectually it might be one of the freest of our English institutions.’

Long live the first Warden of Sawston! And may the Village College of Sawston soon have the company of the nine other Cambridgeshire Village Colleges of Morris’s dreams, the Colleges of Bourn, Harston, Linton, Melbourn, Burwell, Cottenham, Waterbeach, Weston Colville and Steeple Morden—not a common or poor-sounding name among them!

Meanwhile the Quakers of Fircroft (Bournville), an outer suburban working-men’s college, which owes so many of its ideals to the Danish *højskole*, are stretching forth their hands into the vale of Evesham, where Avoncroft, a new type of agricultural college for country people, is to set itself to teach some of the technics of field and garden, but first and foremost ‘ the history of our own country and of Europe ’ and social life.

BEFORE THE HOUSE OF
TUDOR

Going forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.

—*Psalm cvii. 23*

IF you know anything about agriculture at all you know the name of George Ware. He is one of the best-known farmers in England, prize-winner at the Royal and the Dairy Shows, member of the National Agricultural Council, of the Farmers' Club, and of the executive of half a dozen agricultural organizations, an acknowledged expert and specialist in great request as a judge at Shows, a man whose farms the Ministry of Agriculture jots down at once when it makes a little list for the guidance of some visiting foreign investigator.

The next generation of scientists may tell us with more precision than the present generation seems able to do how much men like George Ware owe, in skill and aptitude, to their progenitors. Ware's people were farming, on part of the land he occupies, before the House of Tudor was set up.

Some of the personal distinction of this handsome, gentle agriculturist is plainly due to hereditary habits of leadership. Strange that the country should have been content with a system of titles which has so little to do with people of just this worth and honourable descent. George Ware is not even a J.P.

One of the heads of his calling as he is, and a man of integrity and character, he has distinguished visitors constantly from the ends of the earth, but his cultivated wife, because she is a farmer's wife, is not called upon by the county—a fact which helps a little to make plain some aspects of our country life.

George Ware owns and rents a thousand acres or so, and he and his father before him have been noteworthy for their skill in stock-breeding, for their alertness in adopting improvements in

husbandry and equipment, for their good farming, for paying their men well, and for having some care for the good of the locality.

When one penetrates as far as one may into the inner Ware one finds that, though Ware has probably never said one word on religion in his life, he is a man of religious feeling, of religious feeling too real and deep to allow him to regard, in his heart, form and ceremonies and times and seasons very much, whatever the *convenances* may lead him to do.

He and such as he are the flower and the stay of the Church of England in the countryside. This is because, in them, the gentleman and the Churchman are joined in a peculiarly English way. Ware refreshes his excellent natural feelings with the atmosphere of goodness, devotion, and other-worldliness which the services, no less than the fine architecture and associations of the beautiful village church, seem to give him.

That he accepts as truth or understands half of what is said and sung is not to be credited. He does not. But he never asks himself if he believes or understands it. He has never had the opportunity of theological or ethnological reading, and would not apply himself to it for an hour if he had. It is not his business, he would think; what wise and good men at the head of the Church in the past offer as the Church's teaching is good enough for him.

He goes regularly to church because of what he humbly conceives to be his religious obligations. He also goes because of his obligations as a gentleman. It is his public duty as the leading man of the parish to set a good example, and his personal duty is to support the warm-hearted and sincere if not particularly brainy parson whom he has found to be human and understanding. If he were on a holiday abroad he would be unlikely to seek out the English church, for he would be abroad to see what he could of foreign life and would do, as he invariably does, the common-sense thing. In short, he is not pious, but what might be called a good, simple, common-sense Christian.

In Lent he quietly stops the little cider he drinks, ceases to smoke, and denies himself in other ways, it may be because he

thinks that this is good for him. But he places no obligation upon anybody else, not even on his children, and he judges nobody.

His support of the parson in his disapproval of a concert in Lent was reasonable. He backed the parson's protest because the postponement of the concert would do no one any harm, and would avoid the possibility of hurting anybody's feelings, and because he believes that, if a parson is placed by authority in a parish, that parson is right in exercising a parson's functions, and, when he does exercise those functions, a Churchman and a churchwarden should stand alongside him.

But if a learned friend of Ware's, and there is some quality in Ware that has brought him several learned friends, told him that there was no authority whatever for fasting, he would believe him at once—and go on observing Lent all the same.

There are other things an Englishman—I am but a Scot—considers before history and logic. There is old custom, there are relationships, convenience, neighbourliness, civility, peace.

There is also silence, and facing trouble quietly. Ware's two sons were killed in one week of 1915. A year after, when a handsome land girl and her baby came to stay for good with Ware and his wife, it became known in the parish that the child was young Mark Ware's.

I have never heard of a hard-fisted Ware. But there have been Wares who have been overthrown by the flesh and good living. George Ware is markedly abstemious and rigorously self-disciplined. He could not get through his closely packed day, beginning frequently at 4.30 a.m.—no wonder he is sleepy in the evenings and reading is beyond him—if he did not restrict himself at the table and do his exercises morning and night.

You might spend months with Ware and he would keep talking to you pleasantly in that unselfishly and unpretentiously informing way of his about farming, that his pupils like and profit by, or, as he spoke of people, speaking always most charitably of them; but he would never say anything about himself. It was from a labourer's wife that an old friend of Ware's heard of some acts of courage with bulls and young horses.

Silent though Ware is about his own feelings, inarticulate almost on what is intimate, diffident of speech on any speculative subject, owing nothing of his culture to books or what is commonly called study, he is a man capable of rising to heights in action.

He does not, as I say, read books, and very little of anything else. But if he had the time and had the literary knack and temperament, he has stores of first-hand knowledge of stock and cultivations with which he might make good books.

He respects bookish people and artists more than some of them deserve. He appreciates beautiful surroundings, and, in repairing his farm buildings, would never add brick to stone. He is averse to the ugly thing even in conversation. He does not tell smutty stories, but can heartily enjoy frank Rabelaisianism. He has no satisfaction in hearing things or people criticized.

Outside his technical sphere, in which he is rigorous, he is uncritical. But while he has a repugnance to having things or people shown up, while he is disinclined to look at some sorts of realities that worry reformers, he is not irresponsible. He deeply feels his personal responsibilities, and is public-spirited in a practical way. For example, at the General Election, finding that some of his men had no chairman for their Liberal meeting, he, though a Tory, took the chair, and gratified everybody with the friendly fairness of his few words. There is no limit to what Ware would do for his friends and his family and his farthest-off connection. He is always the first to offer to do an errand. He is unselfish.

When one considers his character one realizes that some of his strength lies in his being amiably uncritical of some things and some people. He commonly accepts people and established institutions pretty much at their own valuation. That, no doubt, is one among the many reasons why everybody likes him. That is one of the reasons why some things and some people remain as they are. Ware is an exceptionally attractive and invulnerable part of the present state of things.

He simply cannot conceive of himself being nonconformist in anything. He does not understand nonconformity, yet he is so tolerant that he does not feel moved to censure it. His feeling

about nonconformity of any kind is, to some extent, a feeling against avoidable unpleasantness.

Of the natural Ware there was once an excellent three-o'clock-in-the-morning indication. He was then a young bachelor, although he always seemed to have a grown-up, responsible air. He was wakened by gravel being thrown at his window. Looking out he found a muddy motor at the gate with a runaway couple, two friends of his, unexpectedly on their way to get married. He went downstairs and opened the door to them. His greeting was simply, 'Do come in and let me make some tea,' as if it had been three in the afternoon. And as soon as the telephone exchange was open he was on the line involving himself in all sorts of good offices for the determined, irresponsible pair.

Ware's men understand and like a master who knows his business, is a natural leader, always speaks to them considerately, and has a long, honourable and acknowledged association with the land. He gives them a kind of leadership that they understand and need, but a kind of leadership that does not seem to be so much needed, perhaps, in the north as in the south.

Ware owns only part of the village, but the whole village is his, and would be, if he owned none of it. His people are adequately housed and properly fed, and as this has been so for generations, they are well-looking. The village is always doing things for itself, and having things done for it which it more or less appreciates.

But if many a townsman might fail to understand Ware's technical eminence, his powers of mind as a non-intellectual, and all his qualities and possibilities, the townsman might much more easily mistake the true condition and character of the people of this seemingly model village with its good farming, well-clothed children, excellent cottages, gardens and allotment ground, good water supply, pleasing village hall, and beautiful church.

Undoubtedly, George Ware is cheated of no end of things by certain of his people. As long as he had petrol in tins instead of a pump it was taken by motor-cyclist labourers. When you see the round-faced, jolly-looking village carpenter, you think romantically of George Bourne's 'Wheelwright's Shop'. But

there are tools in the carpenter's lock-up box which were taken from George Ware's toolhouse. And one or two men, who have known Ware since their childhood, have disappointed him by refusing, in spite of good pay, to finish getting in crops the rain might spoil.

There can be no other reason for villager faults that I might go on recording but this, that even the mastership and the example of a good farmer and a good man are not enough. In George Ware one sees the peak which has been reached by our agriculture under the influence of a certain set of ideas and a certain social order. It is a peak with which many English people are satisfied. It marks a stage in our development which we shall not get past as quickly as some unsatisfied people think.

Rural England owes everything to a considerable number of men who are in several respects of the Ware sort. Every one of us who has friends in the countryside knows farmers who are good men and good in their calling. If we could level up our villages to the level of the village which has been under generations of Wares, we should have made a big step forward.

But that step forward is not enough. As one considers the situation in Ware's village—within the limitations of one's knowledge, and there is much, necessarily, that must be speculation—it would seem that, first and foremost, village people have to be brought to their own feet, perhaps even before they seem to be ready for it. A fall or two will not hurt but mend them. In Ware's village the folk have been in well-intentioned, kindly leading strings.

A fact that seems to stand out is that there is a place of influence in the village which the Church has gone on occupying but has failed completely to fill. It is necessary that it should be completely filled.

Nor is either the school or that humble beginning of self-government, the parish council, what it might be. (It might advantageously be elected by ballot.) There is plainly room in the village for a religious, educational and political advance which the Wares' deeply-rooted conservatism has prevailed over their goodness to hinder.

But not to arrest. As well hope to hold back the tide as a forward movement which is pressing towards the villages, with its way made straight for it by an ever-increasing newspaper and periodical supply, and, above all, by wireless. This forward movement, to which it is so difficult to give a name, may sweep over pleasant things, but, when gain and loss are both counted, the advantage will be real.

I have failed to give a sufficiently convincing picture of a rare and lovable character, if it should be thought that Ware's conservatism is wilful or obstructionist; it is a most liberal conservatism.

Ware himself is only too conscious that his burden to-day is too heavy, that times are changing, that fresh means may have to be taken to deal no less with the human than with the economic side of the rural problem. His kindness and interest in the women's institute movement, his readiness to help any kind of club or new society, mark the generosity and hopefulness of his spirit.

But he does not know enough of the world movement to be in sympathy with it. He is often alarmed. Though some of his best friends are Liberals or Socialists, he does not dream of voting other than Conservative. There is no Conservative in the district, however, whom his political opponents esteem more or count a better progressive.

Whatever may happen in the future in his village there will never be more enlightened, more profitable, or more self-respecting large-scale farming than George Ware's—although a Conservative, it is characteristic of him to have disdained the idea of Protection—or an honester or abler farmer, more manfully and more sweetly facing the trials of the day, and upholding, not by his precept but by his example, traditions of which our people may well be proud to the next ages.

THE PRODUCT OF A
SYSTEM

I am ready now to call a man a good man on easier terms than
I was formerly.—*Johnson*

WHAT I have reluctantly written about some rural parsons I believe to be true. But I have had compunctious visitings.

'It is an astonishing thing,' wrote Tolstoy, 'that there are people who correct others. Can it be that these correctors are so good, that they have no work left to do to correct themselves?' He went on correcting, however.

It is the possibility of having been unfair that besets me.

I do not want even to appear to have been unfair. Naturally. If I appear to have been unfair, the picture I have offered of some hamlets in rural England I have studied is not convincing. As Stevenson's sailor said, 'What's the use of its being the truth if it doesn't look like the truth?' One is up against Aristotle. A convincing impossibility may be preferable to an unconvincing possibility.

Whether I have succeeded in being convincing or not, we know very well that the only spirit in which a complex situation may be helpfully written about is the spirit in which the mind may 'move in charity, rest in Providence, and turn upon the poles of truth'. Always provided that 'rest in Providence' is read in the spirit of 'God mend it!—but we must help Him to mend it'.

I find my justification in Defoe: 'Whoever has travell'd Great Britain before us, tho' they may have had a harvest, yet they have always either by necessity, ignorance or negligence passed over much.'

Women novelists—they had perhaps more natural talent for the subject than men novelists—women novelists from George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë to Miss Cholmondeley and Miss

Sinclair have written without reserve, and some humorous artists have drawn without reserve, what they saw in and felt about some rural clergy.

Generally speaking, dramatists and article-writers have set down part only of what they saw and felt. The reason was not necessity, not ignorance, not negligence. It was unwillingness. There is much that has gathered in my memory and notes that I have not had the heart to write out.

But there are things for which one is disinclined that one ought to do. Many of my readers must be Church people. They are also social reformers. It is important that they should know just how it seems to be with the Church in a large part of rural England.

The possibility of having been unjust is repellent to me, as I say. It is repellent because it is not the parsons who are most at fault. It is, as I keep on saying, the system. This is why one must chance hurting the feelings of people who defend the system.

The parsons are often doing their best, according to their lights. One might say, more definitely, that their work is as good as can be expected from their capacity, their training, their prejudices, and their associations.

It is the system, of which the parsons are the instruments, it is the ecclesiastical era, of which the parsons are the expression, that we justly complain about.

Even if one were inclined for animated discussion with the rural clergy, the fashion in which they go on steadily giving themselves away in print, in the pulpit, and in private would take all zest from the encounter.

The other day, in a railway train, I had an hour alone with a rural parson whom I first met some years ago. I tried my very best to put aside the view of him that had pressed itself upon me, and to listen attentively, with a free mind, to all he had to say.

It was clear anyhow that he was what is called a gentleman. He had a code. He was polite. You could rely on his word, within his code, and on his civility. He was, within limits, agreeable. His English was impeccable. He was courteous. He had the minor manners. But in an old man, who says he is a priest of

God, what does all this come to if most of his day seems to be purposeless; if he is idle, if his conversation is trivial to unworthiness?

The talk of this angular, thin-faced, thin-souled, and, you would say if you saw him, unprepossessing, unintelligent, 'nervous, shy, low-spoken man', was a jet of gossip.

There was no stopping him. In hope of relief, you might introduce any subject from the mangold crop to the morning paper or Betelgeuse. He went tonelessly on. You might as well grasp a burst pipe and hope to stop the water under pressure from coming out. If this clerical leaky pipe did not spurt it dripped. It was incontinent of speech, that was almost bare of real understanding or sympathy, about laity and clergy, rich and poor, Church folk and other folk.

The talk was not actively unkind talk. One would not think of calling the parson unkind or kindly. He was agreeable, accommodating, spleenless. It was just futile, fatuous babble by a man who does not read, who does not make an effort to think, who is without depth or engrossing mental resource, who is snobbish, who is complacent, who cannot help chattering, if not about other people, then about himself. Some of his talk about other people was so careless—he had been in his parish for twenty years—that I knew it must be inaccurate. Most of his talk about himself he had talked to me before.

He got round at length to defence of the teaching of the Church. A sometime Congregationalist, he always does. The Thirty-nine Articles and the Athanasian Creed should present no difficulty to anyone. They were things found necessary by the Church at a certain period. (But why now?) Even this piece of flabby disingenuousness was some one else's.

Such-and-such better-off people, he went on, discussed business or went to see their friends on Sunday. The labourers would not come to church. All the best workers had left the district. Certain boys and girls of his village were immoral. It was so much easier for them to be immoral nowadays without being found out.

But it did not appear that he felt a priest of God's measure of responsibility or the responsibility of the Church, after so many years at its job, for any of these things which were happening at his doors.

Or for the fact that a parishioner farmer was scrimping the wages of his staff of one, an overworked man, who, because he had a wife and seven children, with an eighth coming—in a mean cottage with two small bedrooms and no sink—dare not risk a move which might bring no improvement to his lot on 35s., less 5s. for rent and milk. The parson could preach against the Devil, not against that.

He was concerned, however, that there were insufficient funds to provide a locked cavity in the church in which to keep the reserved sacrament. With what degree of loyalty to the Church of England he could provide such a place, if he had the money, I am not learned enough in such matters to say. There is a paper pinned up in the church porch about 'Special Intentions at Mass', one 'intention' being 'Our English convents'.

One may think such a man negligible. So he is. But merely because he is weak. If he had financial and social backers the lymphatic would soon become the obstructionist. He hangs up in the church porch a list of communicants, a short step to intolerance of freedom, to antagonism to education under other auspices than his own, to the obscuration of truth, to petty molestation and oppression for the good of unbelievers' souls and of 'society'.

What interests me to know is whether intelligent, sincere, heart-whole Churchmen, who are on the side of progress, are easy in their minds over hamlets, at their last gasp, being left in the hands of men so unrelated to our generation, so unstirred of mind, so disordered of heart, that progress signifies for them, if it signifies anything, little more than a dimmed way towards something which is to happen, not uncomfortably and unaccountably in their time, but some time or other called 'the union of Christendom'.

One parson I lately encountered was concerned that there were clergymen, round about where he lived, receiving, as he did, only

£300 a year, counting house and garden. I blurted out to him that it was doubtful if many of their parishioners were making more than £300 a year, that in no other line of life could some parsons earn £300 a year, and that the bishop, in imposing such men on hamlets starving for religion and bereft of intelligent and loving leadership, was—well, acting as some fathers in God do seem to find it possible to act.¹

Says a reviewer, writing about a clergyman and his wife in one of Miss Sinclair's tales: 'Here are she and her John toiling away year after year in their country parish, sustained by dreams of a travel-holiday that is never to come, fretted almost out of courage by the monotony, and only realizing, almost by accident, after thirty years of it, that their work has been a success, and that they have transformed a coarse district into a decent one. There is little to brighten life except their mutual love. The accumulation of strain is not relaxed until they both die worn out. Yet with it all is a subtle implication that this is the satisfying life—ceaseless toil seasoned with love.'

Another layman, a rationalist at that, understood. 'When our names are blotted out, and our place knows us no more, the energy of each social service will remain,' writes the author of that telling book, *On Compromise*, that I have already quoted several times. 'So, too, will each social disservice remain. The thought that this is so may well lighten the poor perplexities of our daily life, and even soothe the pang of its calamities. It lifts us from our feet as on wings, opening a larger meaning to our toil and a higher purpose to our endeavour. It nerves our arm and strengthens our voice while we are yet in the full noon of our days—yes, and perhaps it will shed some ray of consolation when our eyes are growing dim to it all, and we go down into the Valley.'

Or, as the parson who talked to me may read for himself in the book for the pocket that may be bought for a penny:

'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.'

¹ For the conviction of a bishop there was seventy-two witnesses required.—*History of the Cardinals*.

‘Whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister, and whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life.

‘I am among you as one that serveth.

‘The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.’

THE TAIL O' THE GENTRY

Better be the heid o' the commonalty than the tail o' the gentry

IN some parsonages the grey mare is not the better horse. We have read or heard of the lady. Her activities are not always as beneficent as when she dons holland sleeves, and goes down to the school with a small-tooth comb, and summarily packs off home, with sentences of plain speech for their mothers, the children with offending heads.

Very often, however, the parson's wife, because of being so frequently called to the sacrifice—look at her worked hands—has found out the secret that her prosing, consequential, thick-headed, if sincere enough husband has missed.

In losing her life in his incompetence, inanity, and self-love, she has found it. She has found it not only for herself. She has found it in a few of the village women. There are those, chiefly among the middle-aged and the elderly, who hold her in silent respect and regard. The roots of their virtue may have been refreshed by the organized virtue of the parish church, but it is the virtue of the parson's wife that has helped, as by a miracle, these hamlet mothers and aunts.

It has needed a woman-minister to explain. 'To make other people do a thing,' writes Miss Royden, 'you must make them in love with the doing of it. You must make them desire to do it. Now, if they think you do it in order to create that effect upon them, they are merely exasperated. It takes a very holy soul to be attracted by a deliberately set good example.'

Sometimes the heroine of the vicarage is the vicar's daughter. Sometimes, alas! there are several daughters. One of them, when she is almost too old, may take to some job, and, because she started late, may never make much of a success at it. As often as not, one

of the daughters goes into a decline, the mysterious ailment that is no mystery, and may be last heard of in vicarages.

It may be said that the vicar's wife and daughters should not be called on to endure such hardships. But the woman who marries a ninny must be herself to blame in some degree, and no vicarage girls who are of any use at all in the world need nowadays stay at home.

What pardonable excuse is there for the holder of a £250-to-£300-a-year job *among poor people* apeing the 'gentry' life? It is one of the chief things that are wrong with rural clerics that they are or pretend to be of a social caste.

If the £250-or-£300-a-year vicars have taken on their jobs because of a spiritual call, should they not endure the lot of men and women who, in other lines of life, listen to spiritual calls? If the vicars had no spiritual call, they were liars. If they were mistaken and were switched into the Church by their parents, they could have left their job—as men who in other lines of life have made a wrong choice of occupation have come out of theirs—and tried to earn £250 or £300 in some other way.

Bishops and archdeacons proclaim a dearth of candidates for the ministry. There is no dearth in England of men of goodness and character. There were never more of them. Some of them have even private means.

What are wanted in rural vicarages are not theologians, not, necessarily, skilful preachers nor men with private means. What are required are good, straightforward, earnest men.

It does not seem an excessive demand on a National Church that, with a salary of three, four, or five pounds a week, and upwards available in most rural parishes, it should be able to pick out a sufficient man apiece to care for them.

Not a few country parishes are so small and so near to one another, and the churches are now such an overwhelming size for the shrunken populations, that one parson would do for two parishes in some parts of the country, and the unused church would become available as a much-needed and fitting centre for education and social advance.

The building has been consecrated? Is it not still to be consecrated to the good of men?

If the sensible man chosen for a parish cannot preach, he or his advisers have a large choice of many, many books from which the best hortatory writing in the world may be read. What is the difference between taking a manuscript into the pulpit and taking a book?

Another obvious resource is the wireless, which offers the choice of several sermons every Sunday.

And what reasonable objection is there to gramophoned sermons?

But there are few, if any, rural districts in which there are not men and women who, if asked to the reading desk, the chancel steps, or the choir stalls, if the pulpit is to be sacrosanct to incompetence, could address the congregation to good purpose. Many of us have been interested in hearing of the addresses of men like Walter de la Mare, Alfred Noyes, and Francis Younghusband in City churches. Arthur Yapp, of the Y.M.C.A., has preached in sixteen cathedrals.

The explanation of the difficulty of bettering the quality of the rural clergy is simple. *There is no general determination in the Church to better it.*

The worst thing, perhaps, that could be wished for the country parson is that he should be well off. The experiment of well-off parsons has been tried. The results proclaim themselves in history. The results in our own day are equally plain.

If the parson cannot live on the pay for which he has agreed to serve as a parson, why should he, who is so glib with the authority of Saint This and Saint That, not increase his pay by following the example of Saint Paul and taking to some modern equivalent of tent-making? As a workman among workpeople the parson would be in a new guise. One of the faults of many parsons, as of so many other soft-handed people, is that they do not do a day's work, and have never worked as the rest of the world understands working.

The first thing that a salaried parson has to do to gain the

confidence of his people is to let them see him doing a day's work most days of the week.

When the parson's wife is a failure, her failings are mainly due to the fact that she came from a circle of idle people to be the wife of a man who has never worked or has lost the habit of working.

It is of a piece with so many of the ineptitudes of the Church that it provides, as apostles for working folk, numbers of men and women who have been accustomed to live at the cost of other people. When such parsons and parsons' wives, and their sons and daughters, are brought into relationship with parishioners who have never known anything but work, the vicarage cannot, at best, be in more than sentimental touch with them.

'The enormous difficulty of getting the right sort of men to go to country parishes' is a difficulty, not of the men but of the Church. The men (and not a few women) are ready. What keeps them from taking service in the countryside is not low pay but *the mediævalism and general intellectual thralldom of the Church, and the social assertions to which it seems to hold as tightly as to its dogmas.*

The only hope of making anything of the Church in rural England is to get away from *tinkering, bolstering, and make-believing, to fundamentals.*

More and more intelligent working people, with more and more backing, are minded to have a different countryside from the countryside they now put up with. What they see in their beautiful church building is—salvage. Their land is gone. Their common is gone. Their fuel rights are gone. All these things that belonged to them were mostly stolen from them—if not in one way, then in another; at any rate they were lost, undeservedly. And the parson usually stood by.

Of these working people's former possessions outside their own doors the church is all that is left. It is a village memorial of village religious and social sentiment. It is all that remains to dignify the village.

That country people, less and less impressed by the services and service of the Church, will for long endure seeing the edifice of

their own church, rich in local associations and in beauty—and the countryman has more than a townsman's eye for beauty—withheld from adequate use by the village community is a vain thought.

That country people, more and more conscious of their claims, are likely to submit in the future to their churches being taken from them by strangers, so many of whom are idle or pusillanimous, ignorant or merely juvenile—strangers imposed on them by an institution which shows so many marks of the dark ages, Protestants who seldom seem to be protestant against anything that matters much—is not to be believed.

To hamlets which are increasingly realizing the implications of democracy, the Church of England too commonly presents itself as a markedly undemocratic organization, out of touch with the life, feeling, and belief of to-day, an organization from which the spirit of the Carpenter has fled.

Something of what is basically wrong in the Church of rural England may perhaps be realized by imagining the name of, say, a Wiltshire village substituted for the Scottish place-name in the following newspaper paragraph:

'ELLON PARISH CHURCH.—At a meeting of the vacancy committee on Monday it was decided to ask the following two candidates to preach before the congregation: The Rev. H. D. F. Dunnett, Inveravon, Ballindalloch; the Rev. W. E. G. Millar, M.C., Laurieston Parish Church, Glasgow. They will preach in the order given on the 2nd and 9th prox.'

But northern experience shows, as might be expected, that if the clergy, of whom the villages are to have the choice, are to be of just the same old class, the advantage to be gained by electing them instead of having them appointed by authority must be small. (At present it often happens in England that villages do not know even the name of the man appointed to be their clergyman.) Again it is seen that the only reform worth the name must be fundamental, must be in the Church itself.

There exists in rural England—urban England is not the concern of this book—a large body of opinion antagonistic to a faithless Church.

The feeling against that Church does not froth at the tops of newspaper columns.

Few people nowadays trouble to talk of disestablishment.

But to deny that the hamlets increasingly distrust and pass by the Church, that the Church plays a diminished and diminishing part in rural life, that the Church, as now governed and inspired, has small hope of regaining the influence it has lost, is to confess a lack of perception, a dull inability to understand what is happening.

The rural Church seems to have a decadent's memory for mediævalism, but it has forgotten what Wycliffe wrote six centuries ago, 'The Bible is for the government of the people, by the people, for the people.' For that forgetfulness the penalty must be paid.

The Church in the countryside has seemed too often materially minded. It has seemed to offer, in no small measure, instead of the Bible and the best of the world's thought, ecclesiasticism; instead of religion, ritual. But the lives of many people have been aided by simple, honest, aspiring souls within its borders. Imperfect and feeble though the service rendered by the Church so frequently appears to be, struggling folk, with no great resources of their own, find in it, in time of public or private tribulation, a present help. It cannot hide, it has done much to lay open, the riches of the Gospels and the Old Testament. They have shone through its inadequacies. Therefore men and women concerned with the things of the spirit have no mind to give energy to war against a venerable institution whose usefulness in its present form may or may not be coming to an end, but the membership of which the solvents of the Time Spirit are unmistakably dissolving. Even as long ago as 1871 there was, as Huxley said, a body of people 'pushing its way, independent of the different sects of Protestantism and the Catholic Church, having its own religion and its own morality'.

QUEER GOINGS ON

‘Surprising and difficult to believe,’ as the clergyman said of some of the things in *Gulliver’s Travels*

IN the bright moonlight the families in the five worst cottages of the hamlet—they are in a row—streamed out of them. It was like bees pouring out of their hive when they are going to swarm. These flitting cottagers carried chairs, pans, fenders, jugs, bedding, bread crocks, bags of potatoes. They hastened with their belongings into Farmer Bloss’s barn.

The men, women and children brought back from the barn into the cottages fork-loads and armfuls of straw. Then they emptied out on the straw, from cans and bottles, petroleum, and, in the careful way in which country people make fires, set fire to the cottages.

Clouds of smoke billowed gently out of windows and doors and between the slates of the slated cottages and the eaves of the thatched ones. Then there was a crackling and a dull roaring, and flames leapt through the smoke. By daybreak the wretched dwellings, long officially ‘reported against,’ were gutted.

Only smouldery smoke hung about them when the county council’s snorting steam-roller, with its shone-up brasswork, lumbered into the hamlet, driven, in the unaccountable way in which things happen in dreams, by the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Bishop of the diocese.

The steam-roller charged tank-like through and through the ruins of stone, brick, studding and clay as if it heartily disliked the memory of the cottages. The walls, which, for generations, had bulged and split, and been patched and stayed in one way or another, slid down into acrid, smoky heaps, and were crushed by Goliath III’s armoured wheels. The parson and the local M.P., an immaculate young man, had to carry water to the engine,

which had come some way. They were wet, smeared and blackened.

And the children, told that they need not go to school that morning, rushed after the clattering, clanking, swaying, smoking engine, waved bits of thatch and charred sticks, and sang a song neither you nor I have ever heard of, called 'England Free'. All except ten-year-old Jacky Budd, and twelve-year-old Billy Slinger, love-children of two servant girls belonging to the hamlet. These irresponsibles with stranger blood in them rode, with joyful shouts on the diminutive bikes their mothers had sent them, back and forward over the pounded debris.

The schoolmistress, her shoes covered with dust, was triumphing with the children—alas, how many of the poor things had thin legs! Miss Bird sang 'England Free' in her mezzo-soprano, and beat time like a tomboy with a cabbage runt on an empty water-glass tin.

Then there dashed into the hamlet, in a gleam of sunshine, six undersized but noticeably alert youths, in running shorts and various sorts of coats, who jumped, flushed and dusty, from four bicycles and one motor-cycle. Nobody knew them.

The reason was that they were 'furriners'. They were members of the Oxford and Bermondsey Boys' Club, where, I remembered, I had been lately. Nobody could understand them. Who could, when they shouted and chattered and chaffed one another and every one of us in their South London patois? Stunted though the youths were, they were hearty and merry. They looked surprisingly like boys you see at public schools, only they were smaller for their ages.

These active lads had on the motor-cycle a sack, out of which they tumbled—most of us saw the things for the first time outside picture papers—six pairs of boxing gloves. Then, with an air of cheerful rectitude, three of the boys put on gloves and forced three pairs on three of our oafs, who, with Farmers Looker and Horridge, had been watching amazedly all that had happened.

With good humour and friendliness, the stocky little new-comers knocked over our three lads, one after the other. When, with

lowering faces, our overthrown ploughboys got on their feet and advanced on the invaders, the Bermondsey boys shook their hands hard and smacked them affectionately on the back. In another bout our youths got to work with a will and a laugh, but awkwardly and heavily. In a twinkling, however, the whole mien of these bestirred young men of our hamlet changed miraculously, and they, too, were spirited, clean, laughing, light-of-foot boxers; and all the girls were cheering them; and their mothers and fathers, though homeless, were beaming.

And the best boxers from our hamlet took on the good-natured, but not so very brainy Old Blue Bishop, the parson (who is years out of condition but an ex-runner), the M.P. (who is dressy) and the two farmers (who do themselves well).

And everybody sang 'England Free,' the grimed Speaker joyously tootling time with the whistle of his steam roller, until he ruled in his official manner that everybody needed an 'eleven'.

So tea was brewed with water from the engine, and drunk from Mrs. Bloss's better cups and the school cups; and we had bits of Mrs. Bloss's bread-and-butter, which is good, and some of her toothsome lard cake—there is nothing like it—and also slices of the parson's wife's slab cake—not Mrs. Harrap's everyday kind, but the sort that the rectory gives the visiting rural dean.

And then the Bishop went potato planting in one of the cottage gardens, the M.P. lining out, and hard put to it not to cut his thumb as he made two sets out of the bigger tubers.

And the Bermondsey lads, in that grown-up, cheeky-honest way of theirs, chanted that they meant to marry Sally Hampson (who squeals), Gladys (who is sticky), Gracie Pudsey (who has looks), Alice Oddams (who is carrotty) and Iris Attridge (who silently glumphs). The boys said they were going to work for Farmer Horridge and teach him religion. They would take on the job, they announced, because the Speaker had told them that electric light, instead of lamps, might be here any time now.

And boxing began again, until, as everybody had forgotten the engine, it blew up with such a bang and steam.

And, at the moment of the bang, five neat, new, five-roomed cottages with hot and cold taps and electric light wires and wireless aerials sprang from the dust and steam as in a pantomime trick, and the allotments, which used to be away down the hill in the clay, were there in Farmer Richardson's big, easy-working field, right at the back doors of the new cottages, and the allotments had apple trees and red and black currants and gooseberries and raspas and logans in them, but no squitch.

And the parson—'that,' said Mrs. Bloss, 'were a fair miracle in our time'. I have not mentioned that when, in the boxing, the parson was beaten, he was knocked out. As no one had ever seen a knock-out but the Bishop and the M.P., there was hubbub; but the Bishop and the M.P. had him round in no time.

The parson had an unaccustomed look though. 'It did seem like for all the world,' Mrs. Bloss said in her concerned, maternal way, 'as if something had been knocked out of the Reverend or knocked in'. He wandered about without his hat, for he had lost it; 'looked,' in Mrs. Bloss's words, 'as if he might be seeing the place and the people and hisself for the first time'.

Then he clambered up on the wrecked traction engine. 'Go it, go it, go it, parson!' yelled the Bermondsey boys. The Rev. Henry Harrap did seem to have something in his looks that was new. There seemed something new in his voice also when he staggered us by giving out a text:

'They that have authority are called benefactors.'

Few of us recognized the verse, and we wondered what the parson was about. 'But ye shall not be so,' he went on quoting with emphasis, and the crowd gazed at him closely. 'He that is greater among you,' he continued, 'let him become as the younger; he that is chief as he that doth serve.'

'What I want to say,' a new kind of parish minister said haltingly, 'is that the parson has gone from this place'. And then he added, with vigour and feeling: 'We want some one here who will show us the truth, who will show us ourselves, the world, and what it may be possible for us to understand of the future and the universe; show us these things in love as well as he or she can'.

The parson paused and, with tears running down his face, shot out his right hand and with pointed finger cried:

'Mr. Speaker, you and your Commons are at public prayers every day and—

'Young man M.P., you are good-natured and well meaning. Do you want to see and feel beyond the bounds in which your leisure prisons you?

'You farmers! You think yourselves safe. Are you?

'You men! What could your wives tell us about you?

'My lord! You who have so long left a man here who was in fear—

'Friends, all of us, have come short of the glory of manhood and womanhood. Like silly sheep we have gone astray, following one another. By the rod of our own faults we have been beaten. But Eternal Goodness, working in us and through us, is of a great mercy.

'My friends, let us kneel where this miracle has happened; let us say together:

'*And I heard a great voice out of Heaven: Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.*'

'*For the former things are passed away,*' said the Bishop.

But the Bishop's voice seemed faint as if the scene of which he was a part were dissolving. The sky grew unnaturally overcast. The little company round the shattered engine could be made out but dimly. An uncanny, cyclonic inkiness descended.

'*I make all things new.*' The words seemed to be spoken by the parson, but they were a far-distant whispering. The men, women and children, the Speaker, the Bishop, the M.P., the whole hamlet, were blotted out in darkness. Rain came blattering down. Wind howled. Thunder rumbled. Lightning flared.

But, with the flashes of the lightning, the eerie sky began to clear and open out in blue again. Once more we were in the light of common day.

The fire, the visitors, the new cottages, all had been dream.

The old cottages are still here.

The hamlet is as it has been.

CHAPTER 25

WHAT THE AWAKENED PARSON SAW.

If your misses had slept, squire, where they did
Your misses might do the same.

—‘The Bad Squire,’ *by a Canon (Kingsley)*

DANK thatch and slipped slates leak. Moisture runs down the inside of walls. Floors are very damp where they have always been very damp.

Two or three dumpy, blemished folk squatter on the muddy road.

At one cottage door a slattern, who was not always a slattern, takes in, from the baker four ill-baked loaves that her untidy children paw.

Within another cottage door the perky, talkative credit-store man from Thurton asks the price for a skirt that poor people pay who buy on tick. In the worst cottage a labourer lies in his coffin, and his niece is wearily thankful, and also a little appreciative of the drama in which death has made her a conspicuous player.

Mrs. Bloss at her back door thanking, in her kind way, the wet postman for her monthly circular of the Polynesian Mission, is just too late to hear the groans and the shrieks of a woman, wraith-like for months past, giving birth and her life to an unwanted infant in a poor cottage to which the school would be returning in two hours, but for the neighbours’ mercy, six children.

The parson, cycling past to take tea with the Richardsons, has in full view the five worst cottages of the hamlet we have heard about. They are in Categories IV (2), V(1) and VI (2) of the official transcript which gives particulars of all the cottages of the parish (as shown on the next page).

These five cottages that the parson was passing have each two bedrooms’, let us call them sleeping places. These sleeping places average 12 ft. long by 9 ft. wide by 7 ft. high. If you will

Condition of Cottages	In our Hamlet	In rest of Parish
I. <i>Up to Ministry of Health's requirements</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>
II. <i>Would be so with slight alterations</i>	1	2
III. <i>Would be so by being added to</i>	1	2
IV. <i>Would be so with a large outlay</i>	2	2
V. <i>Not worth repair</i>	1	12
VI. <i>Unfit for Habitation</i>	2	8
	—	—
	7	25
	—	—

kindly get up from your chair and pace on the floor twelve boot-lengths by nine boot-lengths, and reach up a little on the wall beyond your height to seven feet, the facts will come home to you. The cottages are as far short of window space as they are of cubic capacity.

There slept last night in these five cottages which have two sleeping places apiece:

First Cottage: Mother, grandfather, two boys.

Second Cottage: Husband and wife, lodger, four children.

Third Cottage: Husband and wife, four girls, two boys, a baby.

Fourth Cottage: Husband and wife, a young man, two young women, two boys.

Fifth Cottage: Husband and wife, grown-up daughter, a younger girl, two young men.

In three of the cottages there is an illegitimate. In four cottages there are firstborn who arrived, as so many of the firstborn in these parts do arrive, impolitely soon after the marriage of their parents.

Consider the schoolmistress's task with the physical and mental endowments, manners, sentiments, beliefs and habits of the children of these five cottages.

Consider the chances of 'social work' with their fathers and mothers.

A recent visitor to the hamlet asked if the people were interested

in folk dancing. No, the people are not interested in folk dancing; and there are things most of them are more interested in than politics and the Church.

Such as, in varying degrees, what they have to eat, the weather, gossip, how to make ends meet, the growth of things, police news from the Sunday paper or local paper, old age, the day's work, sexual relations, gardens and allotments, tobacco, beer, betting.

The hamlet labourers ought, of course, to be better paid. But many of them are wasteful—as the rest of us are, in larger or smaller measure, you will agree, if you think a little. The reason is that they have never been taught differently by example, and rarely by precept.

With more money in hand, some labouring families would certainly improve themselves, after their own fashion. The lot of others would not be markedly better. Look at the state of some of the gardens within a yard or two of the cottage doors.

Is it more money that the hamlet needs most of all? What it needs most of all seems to be a stiffening of moral fibre, a development of consciousness or a stretching of minds, better health, better hygienic notions, better ideals, spiritual regeneration.

More money would be the road to some of these things. Better chances of 'rising' in the farming life would be better still. But how can the foundation of progress be laid in the depressing drowsiness of condemned cottages?

Better wages would provide the rents for better homes. But in some of these cottages, in which there are several wage-earners, there is already an income sufficient to pay the rent of a decent dwelling. There is no decent dwelling to go to, however.

And many of these people have slithered down to such a condition of fecklessness that they are incapable of putting forth the effort on their own behalf necessary to bring about the building of new cottages by the local authorities.

These people have never acted on their own behalf. They have no tradition of doing so, no memory of independence. They have not the advantage of being members of churches of 'disruptions' in which minorities have taken their stand on principles,

and people have held to their views though it cost them money and homes.

Not one of these people is in a trade union. These people believe, what is true, that, sooner or later, they would 'get wrong' with Farmer Richardson and the smaller masters if they joined.

Better conditions of life are their due. Let us press forward, by every possible means, the urgent work of putting sanitary dwellings in the place of their hovels.

But to think that better housing alone will at once make very much better men and women of these afflicted people is folly. Something is lacking in them. It is necessary that there shall be put into these men and women that which will make them themselves require better conditions of life. How much farther on will men and women be who get into a new house without being themselves renewed?

How are these people to be renewed? Can all of them be renewed? Most of the things of which they have greatest need can be brought to them only *by personal dealing, by patient, persistent, enlightened, long-suffering personal dealing; by, in the widest sense of the word, religious teaching that reaches out to ALL they lack.*

'True religion is a relation, accordant with reason and knowledge, which man establishes with the infinite life surrounding him, and it is such as binds his life to that infinity, and guides his conduct', wrote Tolstoy. 'A religious man,' he went on, 'will always know where the truth lies, and where, consequently, his duty lies; and if he does not do what he ought, he will know that he is guilty and has acted badly, and will try not to repeat that same sin when he is next tempted.'

It is easy to talk and toy with the problem of these poor folk. It is not at all difficult, however, completely to understand the problem. It can be completely understood if the source of all the woe be held constantly in mind.

There are limits to what can be done for these people, because there are limits to what they can be got to do for themselves; and the reason is that they are a community from which the spirited and hopeful men and women have been continuously withdrawn, generation

after generation—a community which has almost always been hovel-housed, and is physically, mentally and morally impoverished.

For the solution of such a problem it is idle to think of adopting any kind of short cut. A lethargy which is not an accidental lethargy but the lethargy of decay cannot be galvanized into virility.

Naturally enough, such a community is incapable of realizing its own backwardness. It is, in no small degree, complacent—astonishingly so.

To the efforts of others on its behalf it can respond only half-heartedly, moved, as much as anything, by curiosity, by a phlegmatic interest in the new thing which is troubling its backwater.

By reason of its ignorance it is often in bodily suffering and discomfort.

The hamlet is corroded by uncharitableness, the pettiest feuds and jealousies, paltry snobberies, and trumpery vanities. This corrosion of human nature is hidden at times by little generousities. The most hopeless people are often the most generous, the untidiest and most sly the most agreeably temperamental.

At the root of the plant there is some life.

A main trouble of the community is that it is steadily distrustful of the unfamiliar. It always suspects the Greeks when they bring gifts, and all strangers and 'betters' are Greeks.

Because of its fashion of life it is difficult, almost impossible, for it to understand, it is incredible that it should fully understand life at another level.

As for those who would be the instructors, advisers or friends of the hamlet, it is *only by long experience, only by disillusionment after disillusionment, striking sometimes at the heart, sometimes at self-will, that these would-be guides can fully realize what a gap there is between it and them.*

After a time the gap seems to narrow, for a work of grace goes on in the friend of the community as well as in the community itself. An entirely honest friend, purged of self-seeking and self-importance, comes to understand how full of weeds and darkness was his own mind, how untilled and untrained was his own heart. He recalls with shame

the opportunities of improvement which he has had, from his birth up, in his happier education and environment. He remembers, in thoughts of these submerged neighbours and brethren, that, but for a good fortune, that he has done so very little to deserve or requite, there, as old Jeremy owned, there went he along with them.

The hamlet, its friend, and the nation have to do their best without water that is past.

If any further stimulus were needed than the weakness of the hamlet to bring about active effort on its behalf it is to be found in a strange and moving thing, that, out of the five miserable cottage-hovels that ought to have been burnt, there came forth, of their own will, five soldiers to the War. It was a great and welcome adventure for these lads, but their sufferings were keen. Of the five there returned two only—one weakened in his head, the other to die.

Had these courageous, ignorant lads as much responsibility for the nation for which they died as the nation has resting on it for their hamlet?

To give up hope of the hamlet were as faint-hearted as to give up hope of the nation, of civilization itself. Does anyone give up hope of the nation because it is so little developed as yet that, while its leaders declare that it cannot find the money for this or that social advance, it goes on spending 685 millions a year on drink, 548 millions on tobacco, and 750 millions on gambling, in contrast with not more than 38 millions on books?

When the nation awakens to its backwardness, its obtuseness, its sinful neglects, its out-of-dateness, it will be too late, as I have tried to show, to do much for the grown-ups of the hamlet.

But a great deal can be done, and more and more every year, for the children.

With this new life we shall of a certainty begin to build Jerusalem.

THE ACCEPTED PREACHER

Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting. Thy Kingdom is divided.—*Daniel* v. 27, 28. Pure religion and undefiled.—*James* i. 27

So my thoughts ran on as, in the night and the twilight, I lay awake. We shall indeed build Jerusalem. But how?

After the emotions that had wrung me I dozed, and by five I woke again. It was the sunniest and cheeriest of Sunday mornings. My spirits were as high as the hearts of the chirping and fluting choir. I had an hour before I need get up. I reached for the stout omnium gatherum book of notabilia I had been reading in bed the night before.

I saw at once how easy to be accounted for was the phantasmagoria of the fire. I had indulged myself with an evening of reading as heterogeneous as the page of a dictionary. But the quotations I had pencilled were of a single tendency.

‘We want,’ I had a Conservative peer down as saying, ‘nothing less than a revolution.’

And there was Cobbett in the bit of him I had turned up: These are dreadful thoughts. I know they are. And they ought not to be banished from the mind, for they will return. And at every return they will be more frightful.’

‘There is not a labourer in the whole country,’ ran another Cobbett sentence, ‘who does not see to the bottom of coaxing work.’

‘It was only when he understood’—it was Tolstoy writing his time—‘when he felt himself in alliance with the peasant, that he began to direct him.’

‘We hold it to be impossible,’ said Dickens’s first *Daily News* reader, ‘rationally to widen any breach; it will rather be our effort to show true relation, mutual dependence and mutual power.’

And then the honest, ponderous eloquence of the Declaration of Independence: 'The equal station to which the laws of nature entitle them. . . . Endowed with unalienable rights, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . . To secure these rights Governments are instituted among men.'

After Governments, after the civil structure of society, the spiritual. There are plenty of villages without a policeman or their own, but no village is without a church. What about the Church?

'But it were better,' I had come on Jeremy Taylor writing, 'what your religion is than what your Church is, for that which is a true religion to-day will be so for ever, but a Church may betray her trust.'

Nevertheless I had given heed to a Canon. He had found, as far back as the seventies—or was it the sixties?—that 'we', the Church, 'have used the Bible as opium for keeping beasts of burden patient while overloaded.'

'Is this Church then,' Cobbett asked, 'a thing to remain untouched?' Parsons? 'It is useless,' thought Cobbett, who, from horseback, closely scanned as many rural parishes as any man. 'It is useless to remonstrate with this set of men. Nothing will have an effect on them.'

An Archbishop's son had had something as final to say: 'The ethical side of religion, problems of life and conduct, the growth of character and responsibility, arouse interest. The old dogmas, ancient sanctions and title deeds, crudely miraculous claims of mediæval theology, have lost their hold upon increasing intelligence.'

But parsons, the Archbishop's offspring reported, are 'engaged with enthusiasm and even animus in discussions which would seem to be suited to the proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries. He ought to know.'

But Cobbett's report, a century before that of the Master of Magdalen, had been that 'the labouring class way of thinking and feeling with regard to the Church and clergy are totally changed there is very little real hold'.

In our day that part of the Sunday which the labourer keeps for himself has been taken over by the Sunday papers, in which one may find a writer saying things that are fit for pulpits but are rarely said there:

‘The spiritual life is remote from the split hairs of dialecticians and the logic chopping of exegetes. Authority has ceased to mould the conscience and shape the soul. Men and women are loyal to the spirit rather than to the letter. The mystery of the inner life is like the sunlight and the air. It is free to every man.’

‘Free,’ I thought that Sunday morning; ‘it is to be a Free Church in a Free State!’

In the evening, as I was sitting with the wheelwright in his cottage, his eighteen-year-old daughter came in. She was in weariness of spirit. She had come from the evening service in the church, in which the parson had droned a loveless mediævalism to seven people. Hardly had she uttered her complaint than the wireless, the accepted preacher, began its sermon. From Westminster Abbey itself, which is under no Bishop’s direction, it boomed: ‘God is goodness, truth and beauty. Yet the Church tolerates the hideous travesty of Christ’s kingdom, accepts things as they are and frowns upon those who propose to transform them. It is wrapped up in formalism, in church-going pieties, devotions and services, more concerned with purely ecclesiastical questions of controversial theology than with the welfare of mankind.’

Then in the paper the next day there was the Principal of Ripon Hall, preaching before the University of Cambridge: ‘To the man who has heard Christ’s invitation “Come ye after me”, we insist that before he may join the company of the disciples of Jesus he must affirm his belief in a number of propositions mainly of a metaphysical and historical character? “Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.” I love, not I believe, is the Christian creed. Christian faith is not maintained by the recitation of creeds, half-believed and half-understood; it is maintained by seeking and obeying the spirit of Christ. The briefest and simplest of formularies will enable many to become members of the Church and to serve in her ministry.’

POSTSCRIPT

Know that thy native country presents thee with many
observables.—*Fuller*

What of the Rest of Rural England? It may be said, with some asperity, perhaps, that the picture drawn in this book is not true of other parts of rural England.

The denial is much too sweeping. It is true of other parts of England. But it is not true of rural England in general.

There are to be found in rural England, we all know,
Many able and public-spirited farmers,
Many intelligent and zealous clergymen,
Many self-respecting and well-housed labourers, and
Many villages which are full of life.

One would think that the fact hardly needed stating. If they were not to be found there would be no rural England.

The situation was fairly illustrated in a recent issue of *The Times*. On one page somebody said, what is true, what I have repeatedly written elsewhere myself, that we have in England 'some of the best farmers in the world'. On another page the late Minister of Agriculture was reported as speaking, as accurately of 'the dangerous extent of negligent farming'. The difficulty of generalizing which applies to farming applies equally to the rest of the rural community. But it is a duty to say quite plainly some things which I believe to be true :

1. I have sometimes been as dumbfounded as depressed by finding enlightened country residents prone to take an easier view of the condition of the forlorn parts of rural England than the dreary facts warrant.

2. It is quite possible to live in a community, and have a forward view and public spirit, and not have a realizing sense of what has happened and of what is happening in that community.

3. It is not every one who has an economic sense.

4. It is not every man and woman for whom human life is the chief interest.

5. It is not every one who, to a knowledge of facts, adds enough imagination to interpret and vivify facts.

6. It is not everybody who can see through, who keenly wishes to see through, the pleasing haze of the traditional, the ordered, and the picturesque, who has the stomach for radical change *at the time it is needed*.

7. Even if distressing facts be known, it is quite easy, with a good heart and good intentions, to get gradually into the way of accepting, or, at any rate, of refraining from deliberately protesting against a state of things which is familiar. We have all to own, if we are honest with ourselves, that we have an amazing capacity for refusing to look at facts which we prefer to avoid looking at.

8. As almost everybody in the countryside has his or her hands full with one thing and another, it is easy to believe or to act as if a particular job that needs doing were a job for somebody else.

Cannot one hear people saying: 'It has always been so.' 'Still the people do manage somehow.' 'It is so very difficult to know just what can be done.' 'After all, things are better than they used to be.'

No doubt 'it has always been so'. But that is no reason why it should go on being so.

And what exactly is 'better than it used to be'? It is the ignominious thing that I have painfully pictured.

Which of us desires to gainsay the fact that such a state of things as has been described is dishonouring to a great country, is a smudge on our civilization, and cripple us?

If such a state of things does not exist in your part of the country, as may very well be, will you give your help to make an end of it where it does exist?

The oldest cottager in one hamlet I visited said she knew other hamlets 'quite as bad'; the sanitary inspector declared that the hamlet was 'by no means the worst in the Union'.

Is There More to be Said? Nobody knows better than I do that this study is incomplete.

There is a very great deal more to be said.

But 'Plains-of-Heaven' Martin showed, once for all, what comes of trying to get into a picture more than a picture will hold. Or, as some one put it the other day, 'a good historian must be content to state only a *fraction* of what he knows'.

This book is *ung livre de bonne foye*. But a master craftsman has given a needed warning to authors of serious bent. 'An artist, Morley wrote, 'has not always to finish his work in every detail *by not doing so he may succeed in making the spectator his co-worker*.'

It is a sad snare for writers, who are not of 'the two or three men and women of a generation', to think too much of artistry. It is surely a fatal snare for writers about the country. Another of Morley's robust passages is worth copying out: 'It is a great mistake to expend more time and labour on a piece of composition than is enough to make it serve the purpose in hand. If forms of composition have *the degree of elaboration, accuracy, grasp and faithfulness* that suffices for the given purpose, then we may say that it is enough.'

Are the Portraits and Stories True? 'It is a stark delusion', wrote H. G. Wells, 'that people are or can be "put into books"'. Whenever it was necessary to vary the story that was done'.

'I will tell you readily,' wrote Crabbe, 'I endeavoured to paint as nearly as I could and dared. There is not one of whom I have not in mind the original, but I was obliged, in most cases, to take them from their real situations, and, in many instances, to change the circumstances.'

"Are your characters and descriptions true?" Miss Mitford quotes. 'Yes, yes, yes,' replies the author of *Our Village*, 'as true, as true, as is well possible. You do a little embellish and can't help it. You avail yourself of happy accidents of atmosphere. You strike out or you put in. But still the picture is a likeness.'

'Still the picture is a likeness.' That is what matters. For

myself, I have tried hard to write—oh, how difficult it is!—not the literal truth but the *essential* truth.

What else could I do? Who has made me a ruler and a judge to call forth the blushes or the flushes of those who, in many places I have visited, have been good enough to open their hearts to me?

I am concerned only with the general impression. I am concerned only that my work shall have been done, as the country folk say, *deedily*. I am concerned only that my pages, with all their shortcomings, shall be full instead of bare, shall have, as Morley says finely, ‘*reality, truth speaking and wholeness*’.

All the things in this book, except the dream in Chapter 24, actually happened. But they did not necessarily happen to the people who are described (without being identified), or in just the circumstances which are recorded. There are ‘happy accidents of atmosphere’. And there are places where, it is possible, the reader is led off the scent!

The Scientific Method. To have striven rigidly to fit persons to facts, and facts to persons, would have been as idle as to have struggled for accuracy in the scraps of dialect.

It would have been equally wasted effort to try to bring into perfect agreement the impressions recorded in twenty-six Chapters or to seek and strike out an occasional sentence in which I may have repeated a little what I have said already.

Much of the value of these impressions lies in the fact that they are *records of stages of knowledge and feeling*. They mark attitudes of mind to which one was forced.

It may be that, in further writing, I shall reach yet other stages of knowledge and feeling, marking, I hope, a closer advance towards that understanding of rural life for which I have striven since my youth.

To the criticism that the book lacks homogeneity, has no continuity of design, the answer is that the criticism is true. But it is not just. To have adhered to a precise programme would have been as fatal to accuracy and interest as to have tried to write the whole book straight off. If the book is useful, some of the

usefulness is due to the fact that it was written in a desultory way over a period of a year and a half, and that it has very often taken its own way. The student of a complex subject cannot mark out his course. He must humbly allow himself to be led. If there is an approximation to truth in my show of facts, it is largely due to my notes having been given time to simmer.

More than once, before the War, arduous attempts were made to survey the life of a village in another fashion than that I have thought it best to follow. The method was a laborious combination of preliminary library work, of scrupulous question-and-answer on paper, of elaborate analysis and tabulation, of painstaking photography. The result always seemed to fall short of reality. *The scientific method broke down because spirit is more than substance.*

The overthrow of the scientific method was completed by the libel laws. But when every libel law there is has been abolished the scientific method will still labour in the wake of the romantic

Darwin and Cobbett. Only a critic moderately informed of the nature of the rural problem and the nature of a book will complain that I have offered no formal policy of rural reform. I have contented myself with the job I set myself, of pointing unflinchingly to deeply-rooted evil, and to voicing the feeling which must be excited in every generous mind and patriotic heart. *Je n'impose rien. J'expose.* 'I must begin,' said Darwin, 'with a great body of facts, and not from a principle (in which I always suspect some fallacy), and then as much deduction as you please.'

'Thus,' Cobbett once wrote, 'have I led you about the country. All sorts of things have I talked of, to be sure; but there are very few of these things which have not their interest of one sort or another. Hearing what all have to say, reasoning with some, laughing with others, and observing all that passes, *at the end you get impressed upon your mind a true picture, not only of the state of the country, but of the state of people's minds.* I must leave the making or the refusing of the change to those who have the power.'

The Chief of Sinners. Sydney Smith told one of his correspondents that he found himself 'up to the ears in clergymen.' In assembling my pages I was surprised to find, as many readers will no doubt be surprised to find, how much there is in them about the Church. I knew there was a good deal. But I had no idea there was so much. I have made no attempt whatever to reduce the number of the allusions. The allusions have occurred naturally in the course of the study of a backward countryside, and these allusions must stand 'for a token and a sign.'

The way in which the Church has possessed the mind of a sincere student of rural conditions from his youth up—the only prizes I won at school were, one for knowledge of the Old Testament, and the other for knowledge of the New, and I was once, for a few weeks, a Sunday School teacher—may be fairly considered to be impressive evidence of two things: *high expectations of the Church on the student's part, and many manifestations of inadequacy on the Church's part.*

Fancy pictures of the rural clergy are strewn through our fiction. 'Charles,' one reads in *A Country Vicarage* (1846), 'was one of those ill-paid labourers of a wealthy Establishment, who, in return for a life of toil and rigid self-denial, reap the scanty remuneration of £250 a year, but who look for and receive, in recompense of their well-principled efforts, that which all the gold on earth is too poor to buy—self-respect, peace of mind, and that hope which fadeth not away.' Readers who prefer such generalization to my rough pencillings from the life will do so—and see things happening, before many years have gone, that will astonish them.

If, in setting forth some of the facts that have come my way, I have written sharply, I can only plead with Bunyan, '*I preached what I felt, what I smartingly did feel.*' May we not cease preaching

Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

After a Quarter of a Century

CHAPTER I

THE LAYMEN'S ACHIEVE- MENT

Morley, in his *Politics and History*, sees around him 'equity, candour, diligence, application, charity, disinterestedness for public ends, courage without presumption', and in a passage of noble eloquence he recites the tribute of Sophocles to the unconquerable mind of Man.—*John, Viscount Morley*, by J. H. Morgan

TWENTY-THREE years ago I had all the hope and faith I have now.

But I could not have believed that between 1924 and 1947 the countryside would have got more than three-quarters of a million new cottages—besides all the thousands re-conditioned—and would be building at the utmost speed which the supply of labour and materials makes possible. My own small parish in the Cotswolds—too small to have a parish council—obtained twelve new cottages ten years ago. Half a dozen old ones beyond tinkering were pulled down. And all the new dwellings have about an eighth of an acre of ground, so that the occupiers do not need to waste time going to the allotments. Indeed we have done away with them.

When I went on the rural district council there was no architect; it has now a skilled and sympathetic one. There was a solitary woman member; now eight members are women, a sure sign of intelligent and continuous cottage building.

If, in considering the situation in the country generally, we turn from housing to farming, the advance has been astonishing. It has been aided, of course, by War and post-War necessity. But

the farmers and farm-workers in my parish could hardly have thought of seeing several tractors, a combine harvester, potato lifters and straw-and-hay-balers, and having electric light instead of oil lamps, continuous technical counsel by wireless, films once a week in many villages, and a double-deck motor bus where there was not even a horse bus service. In Oxfordshire alone there were last year 172 applications for combines.

Throughout the country, young farmers' clubs for youths and girls are full of life, farm institutes are springing up, and agricultural brains trusts are common. The National Farmers' Union and the workers' Unions do better service every year. The labours of the marketing boards, the searching activities of the county agricultural executive committees, the work of the Land Army girls, and—let it be acknowledged, the excellent service given on many farms by industrious German and Italian prisoner countrymen—have made their mark. The circulation of the oldest English agricultural weekly paper has notably increased, and a new competitor, of liberal views, has about the same sale. And the agricultural weeklies in Scotland were never better.

We have to beware, however, of judging the general level of intelligence and enterprise in agriculture from the contributions and correspondence in these publications. It is necessarily the more skilled and more go-ahead farmers who are represented in their pages. It is with the others that the reformer must continue to grapple.

As to how this shall be done, and as to the needs of agricultural wage-earners, my view is still as I have written in this book. It is a satisfaction that the *minimum* pay for ordinary farm-workers has risen to £4—very many men get more—for a reduced number of hours, with paid overtime, a week's holiday with wages, besides the six bank holidays, and that an effort is being made to obtain £4 10s. The membership of the Unions is much increased.

The point which has been reached in the rural advance is marked by the new legislative approach to land ownership, agriculture, transport and electricity.

But while we rejoice over the many bright spots in our agri-

culture and rural life we cannot afford to shut our eyes to the grey and the black. Every county director of agriculture can tell depressing stories as well as cheering ones. And when we have heard everything we have had in our minds the day's work only *The question of what masters and men are living for remains.*

Arresting signs of movement in the villages have been the 300,000 women in the women's institutes of England and Wales (and the increasing democratisation of the institutes), the enlarged experience of the men returned from the Services, and, whatever our party views may be, the Labour polls, not only at the General Election, but for the county councils, rural district councils and parish councils.

With the pressure of home and international problems, the question of the public ownership of the land, to which any thorough discussion of the land problem inevitably leads, is not, as I write, a live issue. As with Mr. Silkin's New Towns, it is a case of here a little and there a little. But it is in significant contrast with the political situation twenty-three years ago, that the principle has received wide support from farmers and landlords who are not of the Labour Party. We all agree that, under a good and sufficiently capitalised landlord, nothing can be better than the landlord-and-tenant system. But, admittedly, there are not enough good and sufficiently capitalised landlords to go round. And when we are blessed with the best type of landlords what certainty is there that their heirs will share their views or interests? One result, staring every motorist, cyclist or walker in the face, is that most of the farm buildings in Great Britain are unequal to playing their part in an up-to-date agriculture. And, to an expert eye, it is plain that much land is being poorly done. The whole country has either come or is gradually coming to the opinion that, in the conditions of our time, and in the interests of our people and the world at large, the best possible use *must* be made of *all* usable land and that nothing that can be wisely and fairly changed, in accordance with the best technical and social experience, can be permitted to stand in the way of pressing need.

In considering the future of Rural Britain our hopes naturally

rest on education, which has done so much. They rest, not only on the extension of education but on *an increasing realisation of what it ought to be*. In my own county, which has a very moderate rateable value, the yearly expenditure of the education committee on which I serve is close on a million, and it needs a dozen busy sub-committees to do its beneficent work. In another county, Cambridgeshire, comparable in population and monetary resources, the Village Colleges—only one of which existed when I wrote this book—now number four, all in noticeably well-designed buildings. They have each youth clubs and libraries, and, at Swanston and Impington, seven associated societies.

What a portent when, the other day, two alert, energetic young women on horseback appeared at my door, the one a county welfare officer and the other the instructor in domestic science!

Throughout the villages of the whole country, better-born children, milk and meals, teeth treatment and health clinics, varied provision for backward children, and enlightened management of youthful offenders are giving the school teachers more responsive material to work on. Twenty-three years ago I photographed the children of a village school. Recently I had the opportunity of photographing a group of the present generation. The difference in the sturdiness of their limbs was remarkable. And as one goes through villages one notices the more sensible and more pleasing clothes of the children and the way in which infants are set out in their prams at the cottage doors in the sunshine. Their grandmothers would have said they would get their death of cold.

Henry Morris, the director of education in Cambridgeshire, to whom rural education owes so much, speaks plainly. He sees the English village for what it is, 'a relic of the middle ages and the 17th and 18th centuries'; despite all that has been done, it must still, 'if it desires educational opportunity, seek it', unless an intelligent conception of its needs prevails, 'in the town'. This experienced student of young and adult rural life is for being, as I have tried to be, more realistic and less romantic about the village. As for social progress generally, he sees that it must always be 'the substitution, for one set of solved problems, of a new and more

significant set of problems making even greater demands on human originality and energy'.

I leave the question of education with a memory of a visit to a modern remand home, a fine modern building, in pleasing rural conditions, and with excellent leadership, and of a visit I paid a about the same time to Eton. At both places I saw the boys in shorts. The accents of the lads were different, more of the remand-home boys than of the Eton boys showed the effects of poor breeding and feeding, and a few of the remand-home boys were mentally weak. But, taking these two cross-sections of British youth generally, what struck me several times over was how much they resembled one another; that, when one took account of potentialities, there seemed, given equal chances, so little to choose between them. What the remand-home boys—their parents and grandparents were, as often as not, from the country—had not had up to now was a fair chance. Now these lads were to have it. When I had the opportunity of chats with some of the boys, my impression was the same: what the mass of the population in town and country needs is a fair chance.

As for the grown-ups in the villages, one of the sorrowful things is the number of men and women who, with a better education and better opportunities, could have done better for themselves and their time. To the wireless the rural districts continue to be immensely indebted. A real service is also increasingly rendered by the county libraries; in my own county, the library of which I am chairman has about 350 branches, and the output of non-fiction steadily grows. But to supply fiction is worth-while work. The aim is to give more and more people a liking for reading. With the right guidance—which costs more money than most counties have been willing to spend up to now—readers move forward to better and better books, and the end is achieved of making them more intelligent citizens and voters.

There must be one sentence of acknowledgment, of course, of the benefit conferred on country people in 1946 by the new scale of old age and infirmity benefits.

Proof of the increased interest taken by the nation at large in

rural Britain is seen in the very large number of books about the country which have been published since I first wrote. It has been my business at the *Countryman*, for twenty years now, to read or look through these volumes. When the sentimental, shallow, uninformed and unskilful have been put aside, long rows remain that are sane, trustworthy and helpful. But there is still room for more of the enlightened realism and robust speaking which have been attempted in this book and have been the principle, from the beginning, of my own *Countryman*, the existence of which, with 50,000 buyers at a half-crown, is itself an encouraging indication, which I may be excused mentioning for its significance, of a growth of interest in the countryside which no one would have believed possible twenty-three years ago. Indeed, when I started my review—shortly after writing the articles which composed the original edition of this book—I could not get a single rurally knowledgeable country friend or any fellow journalist to believe that there was a possibility of a sale, at the maximum, of more than a thousand! And the review has had nearly a dozen imitators!

As to the non-materialistic advance of the countryside, the basic question for the rural reformer who is prepared to go to the roots of the problems that confront him, is the extent to which Church and Chapel may be counted upon in the solution of them.

Efforts have been made by some of the Bishops and clergy to invigorate and modernise the Established Church. It is now called upon to justify its position as the owner in every village in the land of a place of religion, frequently the most beautiful building, and peculiarly bound by history and associations to the community.

To some villages a padre has come from the Services who has faced the grimmest realities and had the opportunity of reconsidering his beliefs, his duties and himself. To what extent the Church has the capacity to take itself in hand, in order that it shall be fit to meet, with a reasonable measure of adequacy, the great opportunities still open to it, is a matter of such importance that it is well worth examination in two final Chapters.

CHAPTER 2

HOW MUCH CAN WE EXPECT FROM ORGANIZED RELIGION?

For he saw what they had suffered with no guide a long while.
—*Beowulf*

LAST year Prebendary Moore-Darling, an excellent chairman of his district executive agricultural committee and a vigorous preacher, wrote an article in the *Countryman* which, with the correspondence that followed it, was widely discussed, on 'Why Villagers do not go to Church'. I ventured to ask in our pages whether the article and many of the comments on it seemed to amount to much more than that all would be well in the village if the parson were only a (properly paid) good chap, keen on housing, and an energetic member of the rural district council.

There comes to mind the story of a villager who said, of his ritualistic clergyman, 'Passon, he do antick, but we likes old passon, and so we anticks along wi' he'. But will young men and women go regularly to church merely because, to Dick Swiveller's inquiry, 'Is the old min friendly?' they can answer 'Why sartinly'? Continued attendance at church, not to speak of Church membership, is surely a matter not of good will but of *belief*. The Church is or should be the fountain of truth. Why not be downright and ask what proportion of the villagers nowadays accepts all that the parson habitually presents as true, and whether this has not a great deal to do with non-attendance? On the basis of some knowledge of village life, in various parts of the country, I have said in this book that one of the chief reasons why many of the younger generation do not go to church—and some of the men and women who have returned from the Services absent themselves—is that they no longer share views expressed there.

Education, weekday and Sunday papers, wireless, exchange of ideas at work, county library books, discussion in the village and reflection in foreign parts have had their effect. Villagers also feel that they are 'getting good' from noteworthy films and plays—I have had an opportunity of seeing the impression made by such plays as J. B. Priestley's 'They Came to a City'.

I remember the philosophic Far Eastern saying, 'Even the head of a herring is something if sincerely believed in.' But would it not be of interest to know what would happen in a village church if the parson, besides being a good fellow and 'a rare man on local bodies', got to know from his villagers just what they do *not* believe to-day and told them just what he does *not* believe, and went ahead on that basis with his teaching of goodness, hope and faith, and his work for general enlightenment? An honest inquiry might show, among other things, what some villagers—who, though attendants at church in default of a chapel, have often Nonconformist traditions, and are Protestants—make of an earnest plea for Devotion to the Virgin Mary, to which, I notice, a country clergyman not far from where I live gives the whole of his space in his parish magazine.

Many speakers and journalists constantly underrate the common sense of the public and the extent of its information. In nineteen hundred and forty-seven some farmers and cottagers know pretty well, however crudely they may express themselves, that the Church has been driven by science from their grandparents' hell and heaven and, by the general progress of knowledge, from a belief in the inspiration of every single passage in the Bible and Prayer Book. Does the village church frankly meet youthful intelligence and doubt on these matters? Has it got unmistakably away from the standpoint of King Leopold, who told an English Bishop that 'the only position for a Church is to say "Believe this or be damned" '? It was a Bishop who asserted, in a book published before the War, that 'the Church has lost its ethical distinctiveness and its moral power, has been found wanting as a practical guide on social and individual necessities'. 'In her concern for theological, ecclesiastical and doctrinal niceties', wrote a sympathetic layman, 'the

Church cares more for herself than about the difficulties she is supposed to help to solve.'

A fine old Buddhist priest, a devoted social worker, and a moving preacher, once wrote for me his wisdom in ideographs on a *kakemono*: '*If you would rouse the village you must first rouse the priest.*' Because the churches have the chance of doing so much for the rural districts that the best farming and best housing, electric light, water and sewerage cannot do, has not the time come to appeal to the finest minds, the friendliest souls, the most courageous spirits, and the people of deepest convictions to think less of dogma and more of trying to bring together, for the village and the nation—nay the world—'them that are upright in their hearts'?

What the villager who is vocal on the subject of church—and chapel—seems usually to be trying to say, what many intelligent rural residents of experience do say quite plainly, is that while there are, happily, not a few hard-working, able, humble-minded, devoted parsons and ministers, too many clergymen and ministers do not know their business in the sense that professional men, tradesmen and writers in the papers know theirs and would come to grief if they didn't. The suggestion is made that they seem to be in an occupation, not to have a calling; to have entered it in their youth, and if they have become unsettled in their minds, do not know how to get out.

It is complained that so many country sermons lack range of information, width of view, acquaintance with the best thought and experience, knowledge of the history of mankind and human problems, and, sometimes, conviction, fervour and courage. The question is asked whether, during recent years, there has been improvement in the service rendered by many rural pulpits comparable with the advance which has taken place in two departments of life with which the villager is acquainted, farming and doctoring. Is it not the fact that many congregations which are ill served on Sundays assemble (in so far as they do assemble) under the force of custom, because they think they ought to or as an example to the young, and because they find that they do get something by being

‘in the spirit on the Lord’s Day’, by hearing passages read of high aspiration and beauty, and by being in the building with the tender associations of baptism, marriage and death which an old church or chapel has gathered round it?

It is not as if exceptional brains and skill would seem to be always imperative in a village clergyman or minister. Is the task set him beyond the power of a man of worth and some education, a man with a calling in any real sense of the word: the task of speaking simply, helpfully and familiarly, for a short space of time, on the basis of his thought, experience and reading, to a group of mainly unlettered people, almost every one of whom he knows by name, in order to soften hard hearts, abate acrimony, strengthen the weak and set forth ideals of life? A Far Eastern farmer once said, in my hearing, of strangers who, unpractised, might well speak at a village gathering, ‘They need not be skilled; the face of a good man is enough.’ And there is a story of the honest preacher who said to his congregation, ‘Shall I read you a sermon of Spurgeon’s’—or for that matter, Canon Sydney Smith’s or Archbishop Temple’s—‘or a poor one of my own?’

The parsons and ministers in some villages are no doubt underpaid, but that is the business of their congregations or of the authorities who brought them there.

The statement is frequently made by preachers that they have become discouraged. What good preacher has not been discouraged? Is it not in the nature of the preacher’s and publicist’s job to be alternately discouraged and encouraged?

How about other than financial help for the preacher? The strength of rural Dissent has been in its ‘local preachers’; does the Church help itself as it might well do by making use of all the lay aid it might have in these days when the motor has shortened distances, and so many persons of exceptional gifts are living in the country? The development of local government and the extension of public work generally—and the level has risen remarkably during the past twenty years—have shown that there is no end of ability, goodness and high purpose available.

Why has not the Church been ready, as Nonconformity is

increasingly doing, to utilize the services of women at a time when their powers have brought them to distinction in three Governments, in the House of Commons, in local administration and in science, literature, art, law and journalism and on the bench and at quarter sessions? Some progress has been made in some dioceses. Why should it not be apparent in other dioceses?

The question which is constantly being asked by so many people who look to the future of the countryside cannot be burked. It is, Just how far may we reckon on the Church, with which the State is so closely associated, doing its job of building Jerusalem, for which, as the author of *Ecce Homo* wrote, 'no architects' designs were furnished'?

Is the Church still, in Mr. Squeers' phrase, 'the right shop for morals'?

Farmers and cottagers know that the parsonages have been relieved by the rural district councils, the county councils and the women's institutes of social services for which the villagers formerly turned to them. The clergy are set free for their proper work.

Will all be done that is necessary if they now go on the parish, district and county councils? The clergy would no doubt do as good work there as the lay members. But may it not be rather late in the day for a rush of clergy to councillorships which have been open to them for more than half a century? May not recent council election results, which showed an increased number of Labour members returned, possibly point to villagers being more and more desirous of doing their councilloring themselves?

Every village needs a leader or leaders. But is the autocracy of the French *curé* or the eighteenth-century kirk session, to which a few country parsons would appear to aspire, practicable in most English villages to-day? And, in considering the future of these villages, are we to leave out of account the Nonconformist minister or ministers?

CONVICTION COMPELLED

It is significant that criticism of the inadequate service rendered by some rural churches is heard not only in Great Britain but in the United States, the countryside of which is studded with churches; indeed I lately read a ministerial complaint that it is 'over-churched'. Writing in the *American Mercury*, the Rev. W. L. Sperry, Dean of the Divinity School of Harvard, 'one of America's foremost theologians' and the author of more than a dozen books on religion, says that the reason that outstanding preachers used to be more numerous than they are now is 'the then lower level of culture; intelligence and skill are much higher today'. He expresses the opinion that the influence of the churches is less than it was and that 'the gulf between the standards required for the law, medicine and teaching and those which obtain in the ministry is steadily widening; the doctor, lawyer or teacher has to be a better-brained man'. Why does not the ministry 'attract students of outstanding ability and promise'? 'Primarily,' he says, 'because the student's impression is that his ordination will cost him his intellectual freedom and honesty.' 'My own observation,' he goes on, 'is that students going into the medical school are keener than those going into the ministry; they have a genuine desire to help the world. And, as things now stand, the prospect of helping the world seems more likely of realization in terms of medicine than in those of the ministry.' In conclusion Dean Sperry speaks of sermons. To be worth anything they must be 'from an indubitable inner experience; a sermon requires meditation, leisure and a certain loneliness. But the modern ministry makes this more and more difficult. The ministers are at the beck and call of any good cause in the community. The dissipation of time and effort means hurried preparation of sermons.'

The final word of our authority is that 'so long as the churches insist upon doctrinal tests for the ministry which the average

intelligent college student cannot meet, save by some devious act of mental accommodation, they have only themselves to thank if they do not attract the men whom otherwise they might recruit'. Which is very much the suggestion I have made, that non-attendance at church is not so much due to the fact that the parson is not a member of the rural district council and a jolly chap who can sing a good song at a village social, as to the fact that some of the things he says or reads in church are not so generally believed as they were, and that he is not in a position to say so to his fellow countrymen, who of all people in the world esteem candour.

I have taken an unusual course with this final section of this book. I have submitted it in typescript to a Bishop—not a suffragan—in a preponderantly rural district, to a Bishop's wife, to several farmers and cottagers in different districts, and to some rural residents who are neither farmers nor cottagers. All of them were in favour of its publication.

All the world knows that gracious work has been done by many country parsons and ministers. The other day, in Tait's *Border Church Life*, I came upon a narrative which could be duplicated in the annals of the English clergy: 'Mr. Cranston, who died at the age of 87, took little part in public matters but was eminently conscientious in the discharge of pastoral duties. Two days in every week were occupied in visiting among his people, and it was calculated that, apart from railway travelling, but including conveyance by gig, he had gone over space sufficient to have taken him twice round the globe. Four days weekly were occupied with preparation for the pulpit, and he delivered from the pulpit more than five thousand lectures and sermons, besides more than three hundred delivered on special occasions; and he baptised nearly nine hundred children. His discourses were exceedingly methodical, neatly written, carefully committed to memory, and delivered with little action, but with quiet dignity and a plaintive earnestness that was very impressive.'

One of my youthful recollections is of frequenting the study of another such minister, a great-uncle of mine, examining his library and extended notes of sermons—two fresh sets for every Sunday

throughout his career—‘ sitting under him ’ twice, being impressed by his modesty and goodness, and hearing of the sweetness and nobility of his life, and the way in which his visits to the homes of his congregation and his prayers for children, parents and old folk were welcomed.

What is criticized in clergymen and ministers is, in the main, as I have contended, not the men but the system, the system in theory and in practice. That system must be judged by its results, but we cannot all see those results in the same way. Nor are we likely to be able to agree as to the best results. We have not all had the same experience. Our thought has not travelled along the same lines. The same facts have not been brought to our knowledge. What we can all do is to speak of what we have learnt, of what we believe to be true, and of what, in our view, should be known.

I can but state that, as I read, with attention, reports of representative gatherings of Church and of Nonconformity, I get the impression that ecclesiastical leaders do not understand or, at any rate, fully understand, the extent to which, in the last quarter of a century, there has been, in town and country alike, a change in public opinion.

Can adherents of church and chapel regard it as a reassuring sign, from their point of view, that experienced students of the national mind report a sensible abatement in criticism of both, and that this abatement is pronounced to be due, not to a decreased interest in personal religion—which in my judgment was never deeper or more intelligent—but to a lessened interest in organized religion?

It is as well that I should add the bluntly expressed sentiments of an old and responsible student of rural conditions, after reading a proof of all the previous paragraphs, ‘ You are flogging a dying horse!’ Is this so or is it not? If it be so it is a sorrowful fact. But how much that matters greatly is being done about it?

A great deal was made of the five thousand men from the Services who were proposed for ordination. (A large number were pronounced unsuitable.) I have great sympathy with every

young man who, in the soul-searching of the War, came to believe that he had a call to the cure of souls. But if these new candidates for the Church are no more wisely chosen and no better trained than some of the men who, unluckily for themselves and the Church, are in its rural service already, how much is gained. Will they be able to face seriously, sincerely and efficiently the basic problem of country life, to quote the title of Tolstoy's tractate, 'What Men Live By'?

*

It is remarkable that, when the leading article on the lines of what I have written appeared in the *Countryman*, a larger number of letters was received, from all parts of England and Wales—they appeared in three issues—than had reached the review on the appearance of any contribution in its twenty years' history. Several of the correspondents wanted the article reprinted; all of them—and they included a number of country clergymen, two Canons and a Bishop—were in substantial agreement and almost all in ardent agreement with it.

The impression left on my mind after reading the letters is:

(1) that the lament which is continually made by leaders of the Church and in letters to the Press, that people have become 'irreligious,' is well founded only in the sense that acceptance of particular types of organised religion and their usages has diminished.

(2) that, while among clergymen and ministers there are many good men doing good work, the statement made so long ago by Milton that 'the hungry sheep look up and are not fed' continues to be true in very many places;

(3) that the suggestion is true that in many parts of Great Britain, for whatever reason or reasons, the churches are not, in reasonable relation to their claims and facilities, doing their job of faithfully and energetically impressing on the population at large the highest ideals of conduct and service;

(4) that a considerable proportion of the people, lay and professional, associated with the Church are unconscious of this fact;

(5) that despite (2) and (3), the general standard of public conduct has risen; and

(6) that an increasing number of well-wishers and students of the countryside, while, in Leigh Hunt's words, 'admiring and loving all hearty, earnest and sympathizing men, whatever may be their creed,' find themselves looking for spiritual advance to other sources of enlightenment and stimulus than the churches and chapels. They look for the advance at a time when the world, though cheered on by many rays of sunshine breaking through the clouds, is in a sad plight, and man, as Jeans wrote, is but as a three-days-old infant, fingering his cradle, scarcely aware of the great things around him, and only at the very beginning of his search.

Once more I hope that nothing I have been driven to write, after years of personal experience of the country from the time I grew up in it, and after a great deal of reading of rural literature, may offend any sincere teacher of any faith who is impelled to differ from me. From the time Chaucer was fined two shillings for beating a friar in Fleet Street, Fleet Street on its own *terrain* or in retirement has had to speak its mind, and must go on doing it. Time will show who is right.

What do I believe as I come to an end of my manuscript? That if in rural Britain we continue to advance as far materially, intellectually, and, I will say, spiritually, as we have done in the past twenty-five years, no countryside in the world is likely to become a better place to live in, work in and hope in!

I cannot say how, at eighty-one, I rejoice in my Pisgah view. It has been already said for me. The '*tribulation*' that our country has gone through '*worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope. We are saved by hope. But hope that is seen is not hope. If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Seeing that we have such hope, we use plainness of speech. Be not moved away from the hope. Hope maketh not ashamed. Hope we have as an anchor for the soul*'.¹

¹ Romans iii. 4; 2 Corinthians iii. 12; Colossians i. 23; Romans v. 5; Hebrews vi. 19.



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The author, however, emphasises the dangers of generalisations, of which a book of this character must necessarily consist, and warns the reader not to attempt to interpret the law by his own unaided efforts.

The book covers a large field. After explaining the necessity for an ordered legal system in any civilised community, the author deals briefly with the foundations upon which the English legal system has been built. He then reviews the legal relationship which may arise between fellow men from cradle to the grave—and after, for although we cease to have personal interest in our affairs after death, there are duties which pass to our executors and administrators. Legal relationship is based upon legal rights and we are shown that legal right must always involve a corresponding legal obligation.

A glance at the Contents will show that almost every facet of English law likely to interest the general reader receives consideration. The book is, however, mainly concerned with the civil, as distinct from the criminal law, since the author hopes that JOHN CITIZEN is more likely to feel the impact of the former than the latter in his daily contacts.

The law is reputed to be "dull". The author rejects this view and attempts to disprove it by writing in simple language. The reader is, however, urged to approach the book with an open mind and without prejudice. He will not otherwise accept the fact that law is largely built up on common sense, for prejudice clouds our powers of impartial judgment. When the law seems unreasonable or deficient, it is not always the fault of the lawyers, but is due to human limitations, for law-maker and judge is himself JOHN CITIZEN, and is subject to these limitations.

Is the law really a mystery? When the reader has read this book he may be able to decide for himself whether the iron curtain which is popularly supposed to separate the law from the layman is, or is not only a blind.

A PELICAN DOUBLE (A169)

Local Government in England and Wales

by W. E. Jackson

This book will interest everyone who wants to have, without elaborate technicalities, a plain statement of what local government is all about. It gives a simplified but authentic explanation of what the local government system is, its place in the national scheme, and what the various types of local council do and the numerous and important public services they perform. The citizen who wishes to keep informed on public affairs, or the student who is looking for something easier than the duller text books, will find this book of value. Even the member or official of a local authority will find it useful as a compendious refresher course and a companion for brief and easy reference.

The administration of justice in boroughs and counties is briefly described. An account is given of the procedure at local elections, with the qualifications and disqualifications for voting and for being elected.

There is a chapter about municipal officials and the work they do, the prospects of local government as a career, and the salaries and conditions of service. The relative positions of the elected member and the official are discussed. The author pays special tribute to the voluntary work done by the elected member. Another chapter is devoted to local government finance, the rating system, government grants, local loans and trading services, showing where the local authority gets its money, and the procedure in spending it.

A PELICAN BOOK (A162)

Education in England

by W. Kenneth Richmond

The new Education Act which came into force in April 1945 has reawakened hope of a "new deal" in English Education. For the first time in our history a really national and comprehensive system of education, linked through all its stages from Nursery School to University, is in sight. But most English men, and even women, know all too little about the educational system of our country, the opportunities it affords, and how the best use may be made of it.

Mr. Richmond's treatment of his subject is in outline historical. He tells the reader something of medieval education, of the changes that the Reformation produced, of the gradually increasing transfer of educational institutions and responsibility from the Church to secular hands, of the beginnings of a State system of education brought about by the introduction of compulsion in 1870, of the various Acts which since that date have enlarged so greatly the opportunities open to the unprivileged classes. He deals with the position between the Wars, and the failure to implement the great expectations aroused by the Fisher Act at the end of the last War. He explains in some detail the new educational code of 1944, discusses the prospects of Education in the post-War period, and sums up with a number of constructive suggestions for carrying still further the work which the new Act has begun.

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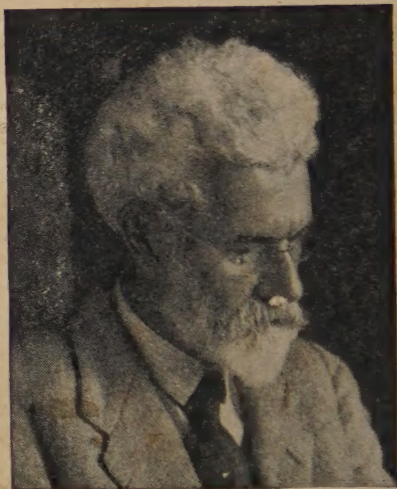
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THE AUTHOR

ROBERTSON SCOTT really knows the country. He was born and brought up there, has concentrated for nearly half a century on the study of rural life, and is known not only as the author of more than a dozen books on the problems of Britain-outside-the-towns, but as the founder and, for twenty years, editor of that remarkable quarterly magazine *The Countryman*, which sells close on 60,000 copies an issue. He is also a magistrate and a county councillor of one of our most agricultural counties, and has been on the rural housing advisory committee of the Ministry of Health under four Ministers. He was in serious journalism for many years on the *Pall Mall Gazette* with W. T. Stead and Sir Edward Cook, and afterwards with J. A. Spender on the *Westminster Gazette* and H. J. Massingham on the *Daily Chronicle*, and has been a *Quarterly Review*-er and in his time a contributor to most of the leading periodicals and newspapers. At 81 he says the secret of good health is work, but he is a teetotaller of the third generation and doesn't smoke, and he has the advantage of living in an old manor house in the Cotswolds and of being a Scot.